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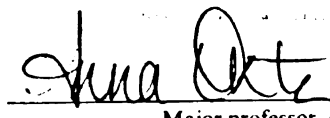
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“PASSPORT” TO IMPROVED RETENTION

By

Mary Ann Thayer

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration

1998

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Abstract

“PASSPORT” TO IMPROVED RETENTION

By

Mary Ann Thayer

The purpose of this study is to explore how an additional component to a traditional freshman orientation program (a variation of Freshman Seminar called **PASSPORT**, an acronym for **Planning Academic Success through Support, Preparation, Organization, Resources, and Time management**) improved student retention at a Midwestern private, four-year career college. Specifically, were students who participated in a longer freshman orientation (**PASSPORT**) more likely to complete their first quarter in college and to return for a second quarter than those students who participated only in a traditional freshman orientation? Did the students who attended the **PASSPORT** program report a higher rate of satisfaction with their initial college experience than those students who attended only the traditional freshman orientation? Additionally, were those students who attended **PASSPORT** reported to the Academic Office for academic deficiencies at midterm at a lower rate during their first quarter in college than those students who attended only traditional freshman orientation?

The issue of retention of students has become increasingly important to all colleges as the number of traditional-age students continues to decline. If colleges are to continue to increase or, in many instances, maintain enrollment, more creative means of not only attracting but also retaining students are crucial. This trend has become important in all

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types of colleges, but most especially in the small, private college, which is often perceived by the customer (student) as more expensive. State- and community-supported colleges are often perceived as the better bargain because of lower tuition rates and financial aid availability. The use of a Freshman Seminar to improve retention of entering students is becoming more widespread in a range of institutions.

PASSPORT, the Freshman Seminar program that was studied here, was designed by the Retention Committee at Baker College of Flint in an attempt to retain first-year students. The program shifted many of the support measures to the students' entry into college as a measure to combat increasing attrition. Two of the hypotheses in this study were supported by the statistical and interview data that were collected: PASSPORT students reported more satisfaction with their initial college experience, their group grade point average was significantly higher than that of the control group sample despite nearly identical group high school grade point averages, and the PASSPORT students showed a higher retention rate than the nonPASSPORT sample. One hypothesis, concerning midterm academic deficiencies, was not supported: PASSPORT students were reported for academic deficiencies at midterm at a higher rate than the nonPASSPORT sample. However, a significantly higher number of PASSPORT students raised their deficiencies to passing grades by the end of the quarter, resulting in fewer academic dismissals.

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1998

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, my best friend, the love of my life, Herb. You have lived this project with me every step of the way. My doctorate is as much yours as it is mine. All I did was the coursework and the writing. You were the unflagging support, faith, loyalty and backbone of my life. I can never repay you for all you have done. Congratulations, Dr. Herb!

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Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I thank God for the wisdom, courage, and strength He so graciously granted me. He carried me in the palm of His loving hands and guided my work. To Him be the glory.

I would also like to thank my family: my husband Herb and my daughters, Laura and Amanda. You have paid dearly in time lost from family life, in lost opportunities, in immeasurable other psychic ways, some of which you may not even realize. Your sacrifices have made us a stronger family and are intensely appreciated. To my extended family also, I owe a debt of gratitude for your faith and pride in me.

I would like to thank my advisors and dissertation committee members also for their guidance throughout my research. Ann Austin and Anna Ortiz were especially instrumental in getting this dissertation to this point; I could never have learned so much about myself, my abilities, and dissertation writing without their excellent tutelage. I am grateful also to Marilyn Arney and Barbara Steidle for their service and insight. My ex-officio advisor, Sandra Krug, mentored me, sometimes on a daily basis, mothered me, sympathized with my travails, kicked me in the seat of the pants when needed, and refused to allow me to give up. I can only hope to repay her by performing these same services for another student some day.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Baker College and several colleagues, including the entire PASSPORT committee: Barbara Honhart, Laurie Ames, Delores Muldrew,

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Ronnie Bordine, Emily Bluemer, Diana Anderson, and Joan Feague. The eager willingness to provide me access to data needed for this study and indeed to provide me the study itself is something other doctoral students can only lust after. Julianne Princinsky's belief in me and this process was demonstrated from the beginning and throughout the entire time I toiled to complete this study. Sharleen Gonzalez, my dean, excused me from institutional service and facilitated many requests for special treatment. Shayne Kellogg and the other members of the English department worked with me every quarter to ensure I had an easy teaching schedule that worked around my course schedule at Michigan State University. I am also grateful to many other Baker College employees whose moral support helped carry through my long days. The friendship and collegiality of Connie Hopper, Peggy Arnold, Joan Martin, and the entire Baker College faculty will always be one of my fondest memories.

I am especially grateful to the people whose technical expertise saw me through the rocky road to computer literacy, especially my son-in-law, Nick Austin. His patience and dogged determination carried me through three hard-drive crashes and innumerable computer glitches, many of my own creation. The Baker College CIS Department crew were also patient with me beyond the bounds of human endurance with my frequent telephone calls for assistance and training needs. These people earned their salaries and then some. I would also like to thank the several student assistants I have worked with over the years of this project, most especially Kim Cannon and Sandra Pennick. Their dedication to a low-paying, often boring job helped me through my teaching

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Finally, I would like to thank the students of Baker College. My students' concern and understanding of my situation were touching. Obviously, I could not have completed this study without the students who volunteered to serve as interview subjects for this study. Their insightful comments and candidness touched me and enriched my life as a teacher and a researcher. Through their participation, I gained a new respect and love for the Baker College student as well as a stronger vision of my own career and my role in the lives of my students. I started work on this doctorate as a requirement for employment; I end it with a firm renewal of my commitment to teaching and lifelong learning.

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“PASSPORT” TO IMPROVED STUDENT RETENTION

CHAPTER ONE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

This study tested the efficacy of a Freshman Seminar program called PASSPORT, piloted at Baker College of Flint in the Fall 1997 quarter. Although much research into the Freshman Seminar concept has been generated, much of it has been conducted at the University of South Carolina and other large, four-year universities. There has not been sufficient research conducted at career colleges to apply the findings about Freshman Seminar to institutions such as Baker College, nor has the research been conducted on the impact of Freshman Seminar on the adult student. Originally, Baker College was founded to train secretaries for the infant General Motors companies that began in the Flint area. The College has evolved into a junior college, an institute of technology, and is now an associate-, bachelor-, and master-degree-granting institution accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools as well as by nine other accrediting bodies. There is a heavy emphasis on preparing students for particular entry-level jobs at the associate level, with a “two-plus-two” program, enabling students with associate’s degrees to gain employment in their field of study and work while they complete their bachelor’s degree. Because of the open-door policy, the College frequently admits students who are underprepared for a post-secondary education.

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Although Baker College is the largest and fastest-growing career college in Michigan, there is tremendous competition for the student targeted by Baker and other like institutions. There is a keen interest by all career colleges, as indeed there is by all institutions of higher education, in the results of retention efforts of any kind. The PASSPORT program potentially could offer Baker College and similar institutions a “middle ground” for retention. This program is not a three- or four-credit, semester- or quarter-long class, nor is it only a “one-shot deal.” Rather, it is a compromise, which the college hopes will reap a maximized return for a minimal investment. This intervention design was preceded by a successful retention program titled “Freshman Seminar,” piloted during the Fall 1996 quarter at four Baker College campuses. The pilot was considered successful because those who participated were retained for a second academic quarter at a 17 percent higher rate than those who did not participate in the special program.

Need for Intervention

Few academicians today would argue the value of a college degree to the graduate. Tinto (1993) argues that males age 25 through 34 with college degrees earn nearly 14 percent more than those with one to three years of college. The faith in higher education exhibited by parents sending their children off to college is also justified by findings published by Withey (1981), who found that college graduates tend to be more optimistic, and with good reason. They “have better opportunities, more job security, better working conditions, and higher job satisfaction” than nongraduates (Ramist, 1981, p. 4). Yet many students who enroll in college often do so without proper preparation for the transition from high school to college (Boyer, 1987). As a result, attrition during the

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first year in college is high, perhaps as high as forty percent, according to some studies (Tinto, 1993), and even higher elsewhere and for some minority groups. For example, Fine and Lehnertz (1991) reported a first-year attrition rate of 55 percent at community colleges in Minnesota. The U. S. Bureau of Census figures indicate the dropout rate for black and Hispanic students to be over 75 percent (1996). Yet these are often the students most likely to benefit from a college education, their hope for a future that could raise their socioeconomic status. Because of these statistics and changes in the demographics of the college-going population, retention of students at the college level has become an issue of national importance.

Some researchers have shown that upwards of fifty percent of the attrition occurs during the first year in college (Fine and Lehnertz, 1991; Noel, 1985; Terenzini, 1986), while others show that many freshmen will leave in the first six to eight weeks of their first year (Blanc, Debuhr, and Martin, 1983; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1979; Tinto, 1987, 1993). “Frequently they leave without giving themselves a chance to adjust to the demands of college life (Tinto, 1987, p. 49).” It is Tinto’s finding that “only 44 percent of all entering students will persist via continuous enrollment in their institution of initial registration (1987, p. 15).”

The students who are most in need of extra assistance are the least likely to seek out such help (Friedlander, 1990). To complicate the matter is the issue of commuter students, who, by some estimates, constitute 69 percent of all entering freshmen nationally (Rice, 1989). These students are also “at-risk” because they are less likely to spend much time on campus and are thus even less likely to seek help than other at-risk students (Terenzini, 1986; Chickering, 1974). The Baker College student fits this profile.

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The majority of the students are commuters, as five campuses have no residence housing, while the other three campuses have only limited student housing available.

Throughout the past ten years much research throughout the United States (Barefoot, 1993; Barefoot and Fidler, 1992; Fidler, 1991; Fidler and Hunter, 1989) has shown that an extended Freshman Seminar, an intrusive and aggressive effort to assist entering freshmen, has resulted in higher retention and higher grade point averages (GPAs), regardless of race or gender (McCormick, 1995; Ramist, 1981). “For many students, a freshman year without the seminar is like getting the test first and the lessons later (Brown, 1989, p. 82).” In addition, students enrolled in some Freshman Seminar programs have a higher degree completion/graduation rate than those who have not been enrolled in such programs (Brown, 1989; Chapman and Logan, 1996; Fidler, 1991; Markham, 1996). Most researchers agree that, ideally, such a program should create a supportive environment “in which participants can face the challenges of forming an identity, of becoming socially and academically involved, and of learning to think critically (Brown, 1989, pp. 82-83).” The freshman seminar, among other things, can help the student decide what is important and what is trivial by helping the student apply strategies, analogies and schema to the college experience, without the pitfalls of a trial and error period (Brown, 1989).

Background / History

Throughout the past twenty years, the Baker College System as a whole has seen an average Fall semester new-student enrollment increase of ten percent, but a decrease each Winter and Spring semester of up to 17 percent in returning students. This problem has been the subject of study of an employee-driven Retention Committee, resulting in

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several initiatives intended to improve “Customer Service,” thereby improving retention of students. These initiatives have included extending evening office hours to better serve evening students; streamlining registration procedures for entering students, a program called “Student Express,” improving re-registration procedures for returning students by incorporating all services in one central area for early registration, called “Baker Advising Days,” as well as exploring the feasibility of options such as telephone and computer enrollment on some campuses. Because of Baker College’s open door policy and the prevalence of academically underprepared freshmen (over 70 percent of first-year students need remediation in mathematics, reading, and/or English), the College has for many years pursued a number of tactics to retain entering students. The most recent intervention attempted at Baker College has been the inception of the Freshman Seminar concept. The PASSPORT variant of Freshman Seminar was specifically designed as a compromise measure between the more extensive (and expensive) concept of a three- or four-credit, pass-fail course with readings, homework assignments and full-fledged assessment procedures, and the one-day traditional freshman orientation/registration. PASSPORT is based on the Freshman Seminars piloted during the 1996-1997 academic year at four campuses of Baker College. Although the number of participants was small ($n = 108$) in that study, the findings favored the continued use of Freshman Seminar (Thayer, 1997). The students who attended Freshman Seminar showed a seven percent higher class attendance rate and a retention rate 17.67 percent higher than the control group, the students who attended only a traditional, one-day freshman orientation and registration for classes. In addition, the students in the experimental group earned a slightly higher grade point average, 2.88 versus 2.62, on a

4.0 basis. The 1996-1997 Freshman Seminar was intended as an improvement over the former traditional freshman orientation without the extensive commitment of time and resources to a full-quarter Freshman Seminar.

PASSPORT was also planned as the second day of a two-day freshman orientation with faculty presentations and other activities to introduce participants to the various offices and services of the College, followed by additional follow-up, support, contact by faculty, and encouragement. In addition, PASSPORT participants were invited to attend three follow-up mini-sessions which were offered later in the quarter to cover in more detail the topics of learning styles, self-esteem, and stress management.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was that of college students dropping out of college, many during the first several weeks of their first year. Colleges are trying to find ways to retain these students, including the use of various forms of Freshman Seminar, so that the students might persist to graduation, thus aiding the student in achieving a college degree and contributing to the financial solvency of the institution itself. Included in this trend is every type of college and university that values retention. In this study, I examined the extent to which the use of Freshman Seminar is effective as an aggressive intervention technique to retain students beyond the students' initial ten-week quarter in attendance at Baker College of Flint. This specific timeframe was chosen to test previous researchers' (Blanc, Debuhr, and Martin, 1983; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1979; Tinto, 1987) conclusion that a large percentage (upwards of fifty percent) of students drop out of college during the first several weeks in college (Fine and Lehnertz, 1991; Noel, 1985; Terenzini, 1986).

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Purpose / Research Questions

In today's competitive environment, colleges must do more to recruit and retain students. Although there are many measures colleges can take to accomplish these tasks, the need to take action early in a student's academic career may be more important than any other measures taken (Levitz and Noel, 1989; Gordon, 1991; Tinto, 1987). Thus, some institutions have adopted an extensive freshman orientation program in an attempt to prevent many of the problems that may lead to higher attrition rates. By doing so, the institutions not only encourage student persistence to graduation but also improve their own financial solvency.

Freshman Seminar, as an intervention technique to retain students, can encompass a wide variety of programs. The spectrum of Freshman Seminar efforts extends from the minimal effort of a two- to six- hour orientation to the specific college (such as the Freshman Orientation that will serve as the control group for this study) to an extensive, semester-long, for-credit, graded course (such as that required of all first-time college freshmen at the University of South Carolina and other institutions). The PASSPORT program to be examined in this study is somewhere in the middle of the wide range of freshman seminars; it is somewhat more of an intervention than a brief, one-day intervention yet considerably less than a full-blown course. The primary purpose of this study was to examine this particular variant of Freshman Seminar piloted in Fall 1997 by the Flint campus of Baker College as a retention tool. I believe this to be a unique form of Freshman Seminar due to its length (lengthier than a cursory one-day orientation and

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registration but less than a full-semester, for-credit retention program) and the type of college (a career college, offering specific, career-oriented degrees).

The secondary purposes for this study included gathering evidence of the students' satisfaction with PASSPORT and exploring the students' views of options for retaining freshmen at Baker College and like institutions at a higher rate than is currently experienced beyond the first quarter. This study is part of a much larger study of retention efforts conducted by Baker College during the 1998 calendar year for implementation in the 1998-99 academic year. Later, these data will be compared by the College to pilot programs run by four other campuses in the 1996-1997 academic year; end-of-quarter and beginning-of-next-quarter data will also be analyzed in order to plan retention efforts for future years.

In this study, a program called Planning Academic Success through Support, Preparation, Organization, Resources, and Time Management (PASSPORT) was compared to a less extensive, more traditional program of freshman orientation that has typically been offered at Baker College in the past. Baker College students who went through one (freshman orientation only) or both programs were compared. The primary research question in this study was: Does PASSPORT make a difference in student retention at Baker College? The specific sub-questions that were examined are as follows:

1. Will the students in the PASSPORT program report having learned more academic skills (such as study skills and library research skills) than students who have gone through only traditional freshman orientation?

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2. Will students who have gone through PASSPORT complete their first quarter at Baker College and return for a second quarter at a rate higher than that of students who have gone through only traditional freshman orientation?
3. Will students who have gone through PASSPORT report a higher rate of satisfaction (belongingness) with their entry into college life than students who have gone through only traditional freshman orientation?
4. Will students who have gone through the PASSPORT program show a lower incidence of academic referral (have their name sent to the Academic Office in an Exception Report for earning a C- or lower grade) at midterm than the students who have gone through only the traditional freshman orientation?

The secondary research question, if PASSPORT does make a difference, was: How does PASSPORT make a difference? Specifically, the following sub-questions were examined:

1. What will the participants perceive to be the outcomes from the PASSPORT program?
2. How will PASSPORT affect participants' confidence in using college resources, such as the Computer Labs, the Learning Support Center, and the library, as compared to students who attended only freshman orientation?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the PASSPORT program, as identified by participants?
4. What suggestions will PASSPORT participants make for improving the program or for instituting other options?

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Summary

To summarize, having a college degree has been shown to improve the holder's quality of life, yet many of the prospective graduates who would most benefit from a college degree often drop out of college before graduation. In addition, the importance of retention to all colleges has grown over the last three decades as demographics have changed the number and profile of the entering college students. Retention has become especially important to small, private colleges which are tuition driven and which often have an open-door policy, accepting students who cannot qualify for entry into more selective institutions. The use of a freshman seminar has been shown to be beneficial as a retention tool in many different types of institutions of higher learning. The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of PASSPORT, a unique form of freshman seminar, as a retention tool at Baker College of Flint, a small, private career college with an open-door policy, which has been thus far underrepresented in the retention and freshman seminar research.

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CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In this section I will discuss various aspects of retention to show how this study fits into the literature and why it is important. First I will discuss retention theory, including some of the competitive issues that drive retention programs, a brief history of retention research, and some key retention principles and models. Next I will explore departure theory, including the reasons for student departure from college, some of the key models of student departure, and focus in on Tinto's model of institutional departure, which is the conceptual underpinning of this study. Finally, I will explore some of the interventions colleges have used to improve student retention, specifically the use of the freshman seminar, and I will end with a discussion of how the PASSPORT program, the object of this study, fits into the range of intervention programs, as explained in the literature that addresses adapting the entry of the adult learner into the college environment.

Retention and Departure Theory

Persistence and Dropout Rates

The problem of student withdrawal is pervasive. Tinto estimates “over 1.5 million [students] will leave their first institution without receiving a degree (1993, p. 1).” Of those, approximately 1.1 million will never complete a four-year degree. Most of these departing students (approximately 75 percent) will leave their institution within the first two years, with the majority leaving during the first year. And this is not a recent

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trend; studies show that this situation has not changed since the turn of the century (Tinto, 1993, p. 25).

Attrition and persistence statistics can be broken down by several factors to more closely analyze the situation. By gender, there appears to be little difference in the rate of departure—45.9 percent for males and 46.1 for females. There is, however, a difference in the likelihood of graduating. Being male gives a student a 42.3 percent likelihood of graduating within six years, while being female results in a 45.0 percent likelihood of graduating within six years after high school, the highest rate of any subgroup. Persons with the lowest academic ability show a 66.1 percent rate of departure and only a 17.6 percent likelihood of graduating within six years of high school completion, the highest rate of attrition and lowest rate of graduation of any group. Other rates of note include those for African-American and Hispanic students. African-American students show a rate of departure of 60.4 percent while Hispanic students depart educational institutions at a 53.4 percent rate. Finally, those students who represent the lowest socioeconomic status depart college at a 57.9 percent rate and show only a 30.1 percent rate of graduating within six years of high school completion (Tinto, 1993, pp. 28-31).

An examination of the situation in two-year institutions indicates attrition is much higher than at four-year institutions; here the rate of departure is 47.2 percent at a public college and 31.1 percent at a private college, from the freshman to sophomore year (ACT Institutional Data File, 1996, in Noel and Levitz, 1997, p. 3-A). Put another way, the average two-year institution rate of departure between the first and second years is approximately 72 percent of its entering student body. However, these data must be

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considered in conjunction with a realization that students often have very different reasons for attending different types of institutions.

Two-year colleges graduate only 43.4 percent of their entering freshmen within three years of their entry, compared with 50.2 percent of four-year students who finished their degree within five years of their entry (American Testing Program, 1992, in Tinto, 1993, p. 18). Many students plan to begin their academic career at a two-year college and then transfer to a four-year university to earn their bachelor degree. However, some researchers have concluded that students who begin their academic careers in a two-year institution rather than in a four-year institution are at a disadvantage of eventually attaining a bachelor's degree, especially when they intend to complete their degree at a four-year institution. This is due in part to a feeling of inadequacy for being unable to succeed at the less-rigorous two-year college (Tinto, 1993), as well as other factors that will be discussed below.

Institutional Relevance of Retention

The retention of students is important not only for the value of the degree to the individual student, but also for the institution that carries its operational budget on its tuition revenue. From an institutional standpoint, reducing the dropout rate increases tuition revenue by \$1,033,500 for every ten percent of the entering student population (Noel and Levitz, 1997, p. 35-A).

However, colleges should not attempt to retain the student whose interests are not being served, nor should colleges use all of the resources at their command in an attempt to keep everyone. This may prevent the retention of those students who do "fit in" by spreading valuable resources too thin. Intrusive, aggressive intervention should be

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limited to those students who have goals that are compatible with the mission and purposes of the institution and sufficient commitment and ability to achieve their goals but who are having trouble adjusting and/or integrating (Tinto, 1993).

Institutions that are in the process of establishing or reviewing retention policies must therefore take into consideration not only the goals and commitments of their prospective students, but also their own goals, commitments, and educational mission. The commonly held myth that higher educational institutions have an obligation to adapt their educational offerings to all who enter, regardless of their goals, commitments, and capacities, must be dispelled. The flaw of this view is that it treats higher education as a right and absolves students of the responsibility of working toward their own futures (Tinto, 1993). In addition, it is possible that the unique mission of two-year and career colleges—to make higher education accessible to all—conflicts at times with the goal of retaining students and maintaining institutional solvency. Colleges that believe firmly in their own mission and purposes are better able to serve their student population by ensuring their ability to spot students whose commitment and motivation are incongruent with those of the college. This then is the first important step to take in a retention program: colleges must clarify their own mission and purposes in order to better retain students.

Factors that Contribute to Retention and Departure

While students enter college with high hopes and aspirations, the fact of adjustment is often a difficult one to face and overcome. Some students have such a difficult time making the adjustment, they depart the institution early. “Most depart very early in their college career prior to the first grading period, that is, within the first six to

eight weeks of the first academic year (Blanc, DeBuhr, and Martin, 1983, p. 80).”

Frequently students leave college before they really give themselves a chance to adjust to the new, strange world. Reasons for student departure are many and varied.

Factors Concerning Students

Part of the reason two-year institutions show higher rates of institutional departure has to do with the demographics of their student population. Generally speaking, two-year colleges attract a different student than do colleges and universities. Some researchers report students in attendance at two-year colleges acknowledge that they are not enrolled with the intention of earning a degree (Tinto, 1993). Often, the students at two-year colleges are lower in socioeconomic status, have lower academic abilities, hold different goals for their education and occupation, and are less committed to attaining those goals than students enrolled in four-year programs at colleges and universities. In addition, students attending two-year institutions frequently arrive with high school careers that have been less successful, making them less academically prepared than are their four-year counterparts (Tinto, 1993).

Much of the earlier research into the issues of student retention and attrition has relied primarily on psychological models of educational persistence. Historically, these efforts concentrated on how individual students’ abilities and dispositions influenced whether they persisted to graduation or departed early. For example, Summerskill (1962) and Marks (1967) looked at how students’ intellectual attributes influenced their ability to meet the institution’s academic demands. Studies by Heilbrun (1965), Rose and Elton (1966), Rossman and Kirk (1970), and Waterman and Waterman (1972) investigated the roles of personality, motivation, and disposition in helping the student meet the rigors of

academic life in college. Today, however, these models are considered by most researchers to be incomplete.

According to Tinto (1993), for example, the problem with psychological models of educational persistence and departure is that they

... focus on but one set within a broader matrix of forces which impinge upon the withdrawal process. They generally ignore those forces that represent the impact the institution has upon student behaviors. As a result, psychological theories of departure invariably see student departure as reflecting some shortcoming or weakness in the individual. Leaving is, in this view, a personal failure on the part of the individual to measure up to the many demands of college life. . . . (pp. 85-86)

It can be concluded, therefore, that, just as colleges are not solely responsible for educating students (the students themselves must take responsibility), colleges should not examine retention issues strictly from a psychological perspective that emphasizes the students' shortcomings. The colleges must share in the responsibility for students' departure.

Other theories of student departure concentrate on societal issues, such as the **impact** of social and economic forces on the students. Educational and social attainment **theorists**, such as Karael (1972), Sewell and Hauser (1975), and Featherman and Hauser (1978) emphasize the impact of social stratification on educational attainment. These **researchers** view student persistence and departure trends as an integral part of the **broader** process of social attainment, a view that includes the role of society in the shared

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responsibility for students' education. This is a wider view of the process shared by many educational researchers today.

In particular, Tinto's (1993) model of student departure concentrates on social aspects such as the interactions between students and other members of the institution.

Tinto argues that

. . . individual departure from institutions can be viewed as arising out of a longitudinal process of interactions between an individual with given attributes, skills, financial resources, prior educational experiences, and dispositions (intentions and commitments) and other members of the academic and social systems of the institution. (p. 113)

Thus, students who have positive experiences tend to persist toward graduation because **their** intentions and commitments are strengthened, while students who have negative **experiences** suffer a weakening of their intentions and commitments, which may **encourage** institutional departure. This difference from earlier models is a primary **component** of Tinto's model, which argues that interactions between the student and the **other** members of the institution are related to the student's persistence. As this model is **the** conceptual foundation of this study, I will discuss it at greater length below.

Factors Concerning Institutional Goals and Congruence

Many students report leaving college due not to financial pressures or inability to **achieve** academically, but to dissatisfying experiences with the institution itself (Noel, **1997**). The consequences of this decision can be long lasting:

Students who drop out of college often suffer personal disappointments, financial setbacks, and a lowering of career and life goals In the past

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few years, recognition of the imminent leveling off and decline of the number of students of college-going age has lent a certain sense of institutional urgency not only to the understanding of which students drop out and why, but also influencing them to stay Although a great deal of sophisticated research has described the reasons for dropping out, with the exception of the very few students who leave due to circumstances beyond their control, the student reasons all stem from dissatisfaction with (or lack of sufficient perceived benefits from) the academic or social life of the institution [A] college can deal with its dropout problem by doing everything it can to upgrade the educational service, in its broadest sense, that it provides its students. (Ramist, 1981)

With this in mind, it is clear the institution must accept some of the responsibility for its attrition rate.

Factors Concerning Involvement

There are several models of college impact on student change which, in part, help to explain the role of involvement (integration) in retention. Astin's Theory of Involvement, also called the "input-environment-output," views "the purpose of higher education as one of talent development (Astin, 1993)." Astin's theory in its simplest terms states, "Learning, academic performance, and retention are positively associated with academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with student peer groups." (p. 394). His theory is based on continuous investment of the student's psychological and physical energy in the social and academic life of the institution in order to prevent student departure. Astin's research has concentrated on how educational

institutions can produce such efforts, thus improving retention (Astin, 1985). Thus, if Astin's model works ideally, a student who invests energy on a continuous basis and who is involved in a quality program within his or her institution may persist, while a student who does not invest sufficient energy, or who allows his or her efforts to lapse for a substantial amount of time, or who is not actively involved in college life, will depart.

Involvement factors: Faculty and peer contact and special programs. The importance of student contact with faculty has been found by several studies, including Tinto's, to be crucial to student persistence. Pascarella, Smart and Ethington (1985) tracked students over a nine-year period and came to the conclusion that social contact with faculty was very important to students' persistence. Neumann's (1985) study looked at high-risk students who persisted to graduation. In the qualitative evidence presented in that study, the students themselves expressed their gratitude for the social contacts they were able to achieve and attributed their completion to these contacts. Thus, to improve retention, colleges should teach entering students how to establish these contacts with faculty.

The preferred contact for students to have as it pertains to student persistence is with faculty (Pascarella and Terenzini 1979; Pascarella and Wolfle 1985; Terenzini and Pascarella 1980; Tinto, 1993). While classroom contact is a given, contacts "beyond the formal boundaries of the classroom to the various informal settings which characterize college life" (Tinto, 1993, p. 57) are especially helpful for integrating students into the college community and encouraging their persistence. When students feel encouraged to approach faculty members outside the classroom, especially when they find those contacts with faculty members to be stimulating intellectually and socially, when those

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contacts are seen as warm and rewarding, students are more likely to continue to persist (Astin 1993). Involving faculty in a freshman seminar and encouraging contact between students and faculty outside the classroom are effective intervention techniques for improving student retention, thus combating the departure phenomena.

When opportunities for contact with faculty do not appear, some students are able to forge networks in which they may experience contact with student peers. This form of contact is compensatory for some students. While some students fear becoming just another number in a large university, the elaborate social structure found in many large educational institutions may indeed account for a large portion of those institutions' retention through such compensatory networks (Tinto, 1993).

Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization "seeks to incorporate both psychological and social structural influences on student change. The model gives particular attention to noncognitive changes, such as those involving career choices, life-style preferences, values, and aspirations (p. 55)." These changes are also strongly influenced by the students' contact with faculty members. When bringing Weidman's model into union with Tinto's model, the result is a strong emphasis on the students' interaction with faculty as a potentially influential factor in learning at the college level. In addition, Endo and Harpel (1983) concluded that

. . . frequency of informal contact with faculty also had a statistically significant positive association with freshmen's reports of their knowledge of basic facts [and] that perceived quality of relationships with faculty was significantly associated with this outcome. (p. 101)

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In addition, living on campus and the institutional/departmental size are important influences on students' level of involvement and quality of effort. Thus, the opposite situations may lead to students' departure from college: infrequent or no contact with faculty outside the classroom, living off campus, and/or attending a large, impersonal institution or department may encourage students to depart from college.

Because of these studies' conclusions, colleges interested in improving new student retention would be well advised to include a teacher-training component, an element of professional development, to train their faculty in the importance and kinds of contacts to cultivate with students.

Involvement factors: Social interactions. Pascarella's General Model for Assessing Change (1984) discusses student attrition from the avenue of growth, which he views as

. . . a function of the direct and indirect effects of five major sets of variables [S]tudents' background and precollege characteristics and the structural and organizational features of the institution (for example, size, selectivity, residential character), together shape the third variable set: a college's or university's environment. . . . (p. 55)

These three clusters of variables (the students' backgrounds, the organizational features of the college, and the college's environment), in turn, influence a fourth cluster that involves both the frequency and content of students' interactions with the major socializing agents on campus (the faculty and other students). Quality of effort, the fifth constellation of variables, is shaped by students' background traits, by the general

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institutional environment, and by the normative influences of peers and faculty members (p. 55).

A closer examination of this model reveals many “loopholes,” places where a student may find college life to be incongruent with his or her goals and interests. The student may discover him/herself to be inadequately prepared for the rigors of college; the student may not fit into the college because of its size, student culture, faculty attitudes, or some other feature; the student may feel that college is simply too much work. Any of these situations may influence the student to depart college.

Involvement factors: Belongingness. One “umbrella” reason for student departure is *incongruence*, a general situation in which the student feels his or her needs, interests, and preferences are not in sync with those of the institution (Tinto, 1993). A second reason cited by students is *isolation*, or loneliness. Like a newborn baby who must be cuddled in order to thrive, new college students must be “touched.” Those who do not have sufficient contact with faculty members and other members of the college community will experience stunted growth and dissatisfaction with the college experience. Lack of contact is “the single most important predictor of eventual departure even after taking account of the independent effects of background, personality, and academic performance (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1979, p. 197).” It is thus reasonable to conclude that student-originated departure is affected more greatly by “what occurs on campus after entry” than by what happened prior to the student’s arrival. “And of that which occurs after entry, the absence of contact with others proves to matter most (Tinto, 1993, p. 57).”

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Tinto also argues that the above-mentioned feelings of incongruence and isolation are more predictive of student attrition than is academic incompetence. The student must feel he or she is making a contribution to the intellectual and social community of the college, not just that he or she is someone experiencing interactions. The student's perception is the key to feeling a sense of belonging, not the actual occurrences; thus, the student's perception is the issue that must be addressed. Therefore, both the student and the institution play important parts in the decision-making process of persistence versus departure.

Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure

According to Tinto (1993), serious efforts at establishing retention programs at the college level must be guided by the following principles:

1. Institutions should ensure that new students enter with or have the opportunity to acquire the skills needed for academic success;
2. Institutions should reach out to make personal contact with students beyond the formal domains of academic life;
3. Institutional retention actions should be systematic in character;
4. Institutions should start as early as possible to retain students;
5. The primary commitment of institutions should be to their students;
and
6. Education, not retention, should be the goal of institutional retention programs. (pp. 154-165)

In apparent agreement with this last principle, a key element in virtually all of the freshman seminar programs investigated for this study is metacognition, the knowledge

of one's own thinking, which can be understood by breaking it down into its key components (Brown, 1989; Noel and Levitz, 1997; Tinto, 1993):

1. understanding what instructions mean (semantics);
2. ability to predict one's own ability to follow directions (judgment);
3. ability to decide what is important and what is not;
4. ability to allocate one's study time and other resources needed to complete given tasks;
5. knowledge of strategies; and
6. ability to use strategies appropriately.

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1993), upon which this study is based conceptually, is a concerted effort to explain the process of how students stay or leave college by examining each individual's pattern of family background, skills and attributes, intentions, and commitments. According to this model,

The lower the degree of one's social and intellectual integration into the academic and social communities of the college, the greater the likelihood of departure. Conversely, the greater one's integration, the greater the likelihood of persistence. (Tinto, 1993, p. 116)

Insufficient interaction may cause students to reduce their commitment to the goal of attending college as well as to isolate the individual from the intellectual life of the academic community. While sufficient interaction with faculty and other members of the institution does not guarantee students will persist, insufficient interaction almost always "enhances the likelihood of departure (Tinto, 1993, p. 117)." Much of the current

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research indicates that faculty-staff interaction is one of the most important determinants of retention of students as well as of better academic and social integration in college, better grades, higher self-esteem, and rate of satisfaction with the overall college experience (Ramist, 1981, p. 17).

In short, the more contact, the stronger the likelihood students are to gain membership in the educational community of the college, thus encouraging persistence. It is this process leading to integration which is a bare minimum criterion for continued persistence. Even marginal students can persist if they perceive acceptance by and membership in some community within the institution however off the mainstream that group may be.

Unfortunately, membership in a marginal group may not be enough to encourage a student to persist in college if the group is too far removed from the center of the college system. Communities that are closer to the philosophical center of the college generally spawn members who persist. Strong memberships to extremely marginal groups could result in low commitment to the institution as a whole, especially when strong external forces beckon. Without the competing demands of external forces, membership in a marginal group may be adequate to retain the individual members (Tinto, 1993).

An examination of Tinto's model reveals a college student has pre-entry attributes, consisting of his/her family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling. Over time, these pre-entry attributes contribute to the formation of the student's intentions, goals, and institutional commitments. Later, the student has a variety of institutional experiences, consisting of classroom interactions, including the

more formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) as well as those which take place outside the classroom in the college's social system, including the more formal (extracurricular activities) and the informal (peer-group interactions). Over time, these experiences lead to the student's academic and social integration. All of these elements, together with the student's original goals and commitments, lead to a continuing set of intentions, goals and institutional commitments, (possibly complicated by simultaneous external commitments) which in turn formulate the student's decision to depart or to persist.

This model is crucial in understanding the process of making a departure decision, especially so at a commuter college like Baker College. Many Baker College students' pre-entry attributes are not what their instructors would like them to be. In my own informal polling of students in the classroom, approximately one-third to one-half of the students are first-generation college attendees. Most have had less-than-successful prior schooling experiences. Many report library phobia, little to no computer experience, a strong dislike for reading and writing, and few if any reading materials in the homes in which they were raised. For many students, school was never a happy or safe place; it has been many years since they were enrolled in any formal education; and they never intended to attend college. The average age is 28 years. They enter Baker College with the intention of earning a two-year degree, a certificate of completion of a one-year program, or a handful of credits in some computer classes so they can become eligible for a better job. The students' institutional commitment, if there is one, is due largely to generous financial aid and the College's high job placement rate, currently 98.6 percent.

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In an attempt to improve the students' institutional experiences in the area of academic performance, entry-level and remedial courses at Baker College are carefully designed to ensure students' success. Many remedial courses use programmed approaches to the subject matter, and all courses are supported by instructor-led labs, a professional learning support center, and peer tutoring. All students are encouraged to join in extracurricular activities. There is a large, comfortable student center open to all students for informal meetings. There is also an active residential life organization for those students who live on-campus. All of these opportunities are widely advertised through Admissions Department pre-enrollment tours and presentations during freshman orientation and registration. Thus, the College meets many of the criteria suggested by Tinto, increasing the students' awareness of opportunities for faculty/staff interactions, extracurricular activities, and peer-group interaction.

Interventions

In order to improve retention and prevent departure, many institutions have designed interventions to improve students' integration, the congruence or fit between the institution and the student, and other aspects of college life shown to be useful in retention efforts. The types of retention programs used in colleges and universities are as varied as the institutions themselves. Programs range from minimal telephone calls or postcards to semester-long, for-credit classes to entire departments in some colleges, all with varying degrees of success. Freshman seminar is only one form of intervention among a wide variety. Since the 1970s, over 75 percent of the colleges in the United States have offered some kind of freshman orientation or seminar (El-Khawas, 1984). Only the content has changed, as the needs and values of society have changed.

A Sampling of Retention Strategies

According to Noel (1997), the goal of retention is to provide students with “lively, substantive learning opportunities for personal growth and career access” through “improved programs and services in the classroom and elsewhere on campus (p. 8-A).”

Suggestions for improving retention usually include first clarifying the institution’s mission statement for all employees and then reinforcing simple strategies throughout the college. Administratively, the institution should make an effort to identify marginally involved students and use the information to involve such students in programs that will help insure their success. All members of the educational community should be involved in retention efforts, especially faculty members (Tinto, 1993). For example, classroom instructors could make personal telephone calls to students who have been absent from class repeatedly. In addition, instructors could include alternatives to lecture in their classes, such as practical, real-world applications of the subject matter (Noel and Levitz, 1997). Other techniques that can be used by instructors to foster student retention include learning every student’s name, assigning and keeping specific office hours, using peer tutors and counselors, using collaborative learning exercises frequently, encouraging students to join clubs and other campus activities, walking students through the campus, taking field trips, varying instructional mode, including everyone in classroom discussions, teaching a memory skill that relates to the subject matter, and making self-esteem an aspect of every assignment (Gardenshire, in Ford, 1996).

It is suggested that freshmen must be reached through the use of intrusive, proactive strategies before those students first experience feelings of failure, disappointment, and confusion (Levitz, 1997, p. 38-A). Levitz (1997) advises a required

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freshman orientation course as the most successful approach to retention. She recommends the course should be ongoing throughout the first half of the students' first semester and that it include elements dealing with personal and academic survival as well as major and career decision-making techniques. Such a course should be facilitated by teachers who are carefully selected and trained to not only facilitate the course but also to serve as advisors to their sections (p. 40-A).

Freshman Seminar as Intervention

Offering an extensive freshman seminar is one intrusive method that has been shown by nearly a century of statistics (Gordon, 1991) to be of benefit in improving the level of student satisfaction with the college experience. By introducing students to services during freshman seminar, a college can improve the student's perception of those services and thus improve retention (Levitz and Noel, 1997). The efforts expended for a freshman seminar can reap higher retention, especially in an institution with an open-door policy. Colleges using an open-door admissions policy accept virtually all applicants, including many underprepared students, whose special needs and deficiencies could be addressed through the use of freshman seminar (Rice, 1989). While such a program cannot solve all of the students' problems, it could be used to teach students how to cope with many of the commonly cited reasons for dropping out, including academic matters (poor grades, boredom, change in career goals), financial difficulties, motivational problems (uncertainty, lack of interest, inability or unwillingness to study), personal considerations (emotional problems, pregnancy, marriage, illness, family responsibilities), dissatisfaction with the college, and acquiring full-time employment (Ramist, 1981).

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Two important keys to improving student retention at the college level, as discussed above, are to increase students' integration into the college community and to provide them with the requisite skills for persistence. Freshman Seminar has been shown to provide these tools to students and, as a result, to improve retention (Barefoot, 1993; Cuseo, 1991; Fidler and Godwin, 1994; Mohammadi, 1994; Odell, 1996; Rice and Coll, 1991; Shanley and Witten, 1990; Sherry and Sherry, 1996). "Having the requisite skills for persistence is one thing. Being able to apply them in perhaps strange settings is another (Tinto, 1993, p. 73)."

Cuseo (1991) presents a framework for developing a freshman seminar which includes extra instruction in study skills, notetaking and test taking techniques, reading and writing skills, and library research techniques. Cuseo's examination of the freshman seminars at various colleges and universities led him to conclude that higher sophomore retention rates, better persistence to graduation, and higher academic achievement by at-risk students can be achieved with the freshman seminar. Barefoot and Fidler (1992) reported a 43-percent response rate in a survey of 2,460 institutions regarding content of their freshman seminar. Instrumental topics included basic study skills, time management, campus facilities and resources, wellness issues, relationship issues, self-knowledge, campus rules, cultural diversity, goal setting, library skills, and other topics. Reporting institutions concluded these elements were the most helpful to their students.

Types of Freshman Seminars

Most freshman seminars can be divided into two main types--those emphasizing *orientation* to college life and those emphasizing academic assistance. The five *variations* of these types are as follows:

1. orientation: adjustment; emphasizes student's relationship to the institution (Gordon, 1991); practical content, i.e., campus resources, study skills;
2. academic: intellectual content, critical thinking;
3. professional: content of the career field;
4. curricular: residence life programs; orients students to social problems, introduces them to the humanities (Gordon, 1991); and
5. eclectic: some of all of the above (Murphy, 1989).

Recently, several studies on retention were reported in *Student Retention: Success Models in Higher Education* (1996). The AHANA (African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American) Student Program at Boston College includes a mandatory summer orientation program and academic support services (tutorials, academic advisement, personal counseling, academic performance monitoring, career counseling, comprehensive financial aid, mentoring, involvement in the community, religion as a critical element, and the importance of evaluation) to prevent departure of minority students (in Ford, 1996, p. 12-18).

Another retention program, "The Bridge," is designed to help African-American students at the predominantly white Georgia State University in Atlanta. Consisting of a four-week, nonresidential program, forty students who are deficient in math, reading, and/or composition are allowed in the program. Applicants must have applied to the program and be African-American. The program content consists of four hours of math per week, two hours of computer instruction in math theory and operations, and eight hours of language arts per week. As a direct result of the Bridge, during the years 1984

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to 1994, the average first year retention was 82 percent. The Bridge works partly because it involves white faculty and staff as program instructors, mentors, academic advisors, and positive role models. "This promotes close faculty/staff/student relationships, making students feel accepted, respected and supported, therefore, enhancing their chances for retention and graduation" (Chapman and Logan, in Ford, 1996, pp. 29-35).

"Project BEAM" (Being Excited About Me) is a retention program that emphasizes the students' self-esteem and "focuses on the development of the whole student: physical, spiritual, intellectual, social and emotional (Belmear, in Ford, 1996, p. 123)." Other recent retention programs emphasize mentoring, study skills, social events (Markham, in Ford, 1996), small groups, and cultural diversity, as well as the elements discussed above.

In summary, since World War I most freshman seminars have included at least some elements of knowledge of the campus, learning to learn, and social adjustment issues in a variety of formats. Many programs are aimed at a specific student population, such as minority students, while others are open to all entering freshmen. The majority of the programs aim to retain traditional-age students beyond their first semester and/or first year.

Adult Students and Commuters: How Are They Unique?

Risks and Fears for Adult Students and Commuters

Changes in our society have led to changes in the way a college education is approached. Many students are delaying the decision to attend college and choosing part-time enrollment as adults as an alternative to a traditional residential, full-time experience immediately following high school graduation. From 1970 to 1990 the part-time

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students' share of total college enrollment went from 28 percent to 42 percent of the total. This gradual change in the composition of the student body is indicative of students' thinking (McCormick, 1995, p. 1). Two trends explain the reasons for this change. First, approximately 70 percent of the growth has been among older students, who are generally more likely to be attending part-time and at community colleges rather than at universities. Second, the percentage of traditional age students who attend part-time has grown from 16 percent of the total in 1970 to 21 percent of the total in 1990. The seriousness of the change in the composition of the student body can be seen in attrition statistics: part-time students are at a greater risk of dropping out of college than are full-time students. Many students consider only the convenience of taking a class or two at a time or the reduced per-semester cost and do not look at the long-term investment required by attending college part-time (McCormick, 1995). This investment includes not only the added financial burden of per-semester fees but psychic costs as well, such as added stress on the family. In addition, exclusively part-time students have lower educational expectations. McCormick (1995) reported that only 39 percent of part-time students expected eventually to earn an advanced degree as opposed to 58 percent of full-time students.

Studies have shown that adult students face special problems in addition to those cited above in their attempts to persist in college. Many adult learners must find time and energy to attend college and complete coursework while they are also coping with family and/or work responsibilities. Female adult students especially find family responsibilities an obstacle to involvement in campus activities, whereas family responsibilities actually lead to higher rates of persistence for male students. Hispanic women are more likely

than any other group to encounter difficulties persisting in college due to family responsibilities, whether they are married or single (Tinto, 1993).

Many adult students have work responsibilities that potentially can detract from their commitment to pursuing an education. Full-time employment can be more **detrimental** to persistence than part-time work, and working off campus is more harmful **to** persistence than working on campus. There is some evidence that work-study **employment** on campus may actually improve persistence (Astin, 1993) by increasing **students'** chances for interaction with the other members of the campus community, thus **improving** their integration into college life.

The above stated family and work responsibilities are often the cause of students' **early** departure from the institution. One reason is that adult students generally find it **difficult** to spend time on campus. If the student's commitment to pursuing an education **is weak**, the feeling of not belonging to the college community can lead to departure. If **that** adult student is also shy, has difficulty meeting others and making friends, or does **not deal** well with new situations, the result may be withdrawal, both withdrawing within **oneself** and eventually, withdrawing from college. A sense of marginality generally **makes** departure more likely (Tinto, 1993).

Special Needs of Adult Students

Many retention programs overtly target minority students and other groups **perceived** as marginal for an important reason. Often these groups are underrepresented; **there** may be federal laws and/or programs to support these groups; the institution may be **seeking** entry into a market where it has not been strong in the past. Research indicates

adult students are also often a targeted group in retention efforts, usually due to their family and work responsibilities and reduced time spent on campus.

[T]hey tend to be less likely than residential students to be involved in the intellectual and social life of the institution and interact with the institution's major agents of socialization, faculty and students.

(Chickering, 1974, p. 64)

Furthermore, for many adult learners, being thrust into the youth-oriented world of college can be doubly disconcerting, not only because of the newness of academia but also because of the overwhelming feeling of not fitting in. Older students have different values and dispositions than younger students as well as work and/or family responsibilities that prevent them from making more of an investment into the college's social and academic networks. It is for these reasons that contact with faculty members outside the classroom may be an even stronger predictor of adult/commuter student persistence, especially if that adult learner also happens to be marginal in academic ability or marginalized in any other way (Tinto, 1993).

Designing Entering Programs for Adults

Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) discuss ways of improving adult students' entrance into college starting with an awareness of what they go through, from getting in, to picking a major and degree, to transferring credit, to starting coursework. They also suggest establishing an entry center to coordinate services and programs, including recruiting and admissions, financial aid, employment services, counseling, testing, and registration. Another suggestion is for colleges to write college catalogs and other recruiting literature at an eighth-grade reading level to reach an average-level

literate adult, rather than the grade 16 or 17 that many college catalogs are currently written for (Adams, 1986). Using a toll-free telephone number is another idea colleges might adopt to attract adult learners, as well as recruiting using a mix of staff, faculty, and students of various ages at community events. Finally, the authors recommend the **use** of an entry/orientation workshop to be offered at diverse times and locations with **contact** between faculty and staff and the entering adult students. Such workshops should **include** information on the institution, its faculty, staff, and resources; support (peer) **groups**; and follow-up sessions during the first semester. They suggest the content of the **workshop** should include adult development theory, a learning styles assessment, **decision-making** strategies, career exploration, educational planning, and lifestyles **development** (Viniar, 1984).

The *ACE Adult Learner Assessment and Planning Guide* (1984), used to assess **freshman** orientation programs, suggests directors of such programs include ways for **participants** to achieve self-understanding regarding typical adult learning styles; content **matter** relating to the pertinence of knowledge and competence from prior experiences; **attention** to professional, vocational, and life-cycle plans and aspirations; information **about** institutional resources available through student services; attention to academic **program** alternatives and requirements of particular concern to adult learners; a **description** of “academic culture;” and orientation sessions for the families of adult **learners**.

Adapting the Educational Environment to Adults

Tinto’s model is based on years of research on traditional-age students, although **he does** briefly discuss the needs of the adult learner occasionally in his work. Because

the adult learner is substantially different from the 18- to 22-year-old student Tinto studies, several aspects of the educational environment need to be adapted to the adult learner. While the earlier work dealing with adult learning focused on the differences between teaching adults and younger college students (Knowles, 1980), it should be noted that the techniques used to teach adults can and should be extended to the teaching of younger students as well without any loss of quality. In fact, many of the techniques used to address adult learners can actually add dignity and collegiality to the classroom for all present.

Certain techniques of teaching adults are preferred because they support the needs that adults face, as suggested by theories and research that pertain to work and family, life events and transitions, and developmental tasks and social roles (Merriam, in Sinnott, 1994, p. 74). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1987), 64 percent of adult learners indicate their reason for enrolling in college courses is job related. With this in mind, one of the most important premises of adapting the college environment to the adult learner is to make the learning relevant. The triggering event for adults surveyed in another study (Merriam, in Sinnott, 1994) was found to be either family-related (36 percent) or career-related (56 percent). The second perspective refers to individual life events, such as changes in family status or condition. These transitions in one's life precipitate a decision to attend college and affect the adult learner's motivation, attendance, and persistence. Finally, the third perspective deals with life stages, or what has been termed "teachable moments" (Havinghurst, in Merriam, 1994, p. 79). Adults learn when they are ready to learn, that readiness being brought on by some developmental task with which the learner is faced in his or her social life. The college

instructor must be alert to these opportunities and tailor the learning to them. One way this can be accomplished is by incorporating the adult students' life experiences into the classroom as a resource. In addition, college instructors must remember that because they are teaching adults, frequently life realities will take precedence over institutional rules and conveniences; thus instructors need to be more flexible with this type of learner (Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering, 1989).

Summary

I have reviewed in this chapter retention and departure theory, including persistence and dropout rates, the institutional relevance of retention, and the factors that contribute to retention and departure, concentrating particularly on the factors that concern students, institutional goals and congruence, and involvement. The discussion here also establishes Tinto's model of institutional departure as the underpinning of this study. In addition, I have discussed a variety of interventions used throughout the United States to retain students and explored the available literature on the uniqueness of the adult learner, addressing the risks and fears of adult students as well as their special needs; how to design entering programs for adults, and how to adapt the educational environment to adults. The concept, design, and study of the PASSPORT program will be further discussed in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Introduction

In this study, the efficacy of a variant of Freshman Seminar called **Planning Academic Success through Support, Preparation, Organization, Resources, and Time Management (PASSPORT)** was compared to a less extensive, more traditional program **of freshman** orientation as an intentional, aggressive measure to retain first-year students. **The** program was designed to improve student retention by encouraging more interaction **between** participants and other members of the educational community: faculty in and **outside** of class, various support staff, other students in and outside of class, and members **of ex**tracurricular activities and organizations. In this chapter I include the site **descri**ption, the conceptual framework of the study, and explain the study design, **includ**ing the sample and the methodology.

Site Description: Baker College

Established in 1888, the Baker College System is a private career college with **twelve** locations throughout lower Michigan. There are main campuses in Auburn Hills, **Cadillac**, Flint, Jackson, Muskegon, Mount Clemens, Owosso, and Port Huron, with **satellites** in Cass City and Fremont. There is also a Corporate Services division, **head**quartered in Flint, which offers classes off-campus, primarily at General Motors **plants**, and a Center for Graduate Studies, located physically in Flint but offering both on-**line** and on-ground degrees. Flint is the main campus and has the largest student

population, with 3,934 students of over 13,000 students system-wide (1997-1998 Baker College Undergraduate and Graduate Catalog), and is where this study was conducted.

Baker College offers more than 90 master's degree, bachelor degree, associate degree, and diploma and certificate programs in business administration, computer information systems, health and human services, office administration, and engineering and technical studies. The emphasis is on associate degrees and building from there. Many students take advantage of the 2 + 2 plan, which allows students to earn an associate degree, begin working, then continue their education and earn a bachelor degree.

The College's mission statement is "to provide quality higher education which enables graduates to be successful throughout challenging and rewarding careers." Throughout the past twenty years, the College System as a whole has seen an average Fall semester new-student enrollment increase of ten percent, but a drop each Winter and Spring semester of up to 17 percent in returning students. This problem has been the subject of study of an employee-driven Retention Committee, resulting in several initiatives intended to improve "Customer Service," thereby improving retention of students. These initiatives have included extending evening office hours to better serve evening students; streamlining registration procedures for entering students, a program called "Student Express;" improving re-registration procedures for returning students by incorporating all services in one central area for early registration, called "Baker Advising Days;" as well as exploring the feasibility of options such as telephone and computer enrollment on some campuses.

Because of Baker College's open door policy and the prevalence of academically underprepared freshmen (over 70 percent of first-year students need remediation in mathematics, reading, and/or English), the College has for many years pursued a number of tactics to retain entering students. The College uses the ASSET test to determine placement in courses in reading, English, and mathematics, as well as encourages a study skills course for those students whose total ASSET score indicates a strong need for assistance in college study habits in general. In 1995 the college began administering the Productivity Environmental Preference Survey (PEPS, based on Dunn and Dunn, 1987) to all entering freshmen. The students' scores from the PEPS are used to place students whose ASSET score indicates a need for Basic Mathematics into one of three formats of the course, based on the match between the students' Learning Style and the proposed Teaching Style for each format of the course.

The most recent intervention attempted at Baker College has been the inception of the Freshmen Seminar concept. By introducing students to services during Freshman Seminar, a college can improve the students' perception of those services and of their need to seek help, thus improving retention (Levitz and Noel, 1989). The efforts and resources expended for a Freshman Seminar can reap higher retention, especially in an institution with an open-door policy, such as Baker College. Because of its acceptance of all students regardless of high school grade point average, it is expected that such a college could better serve its freshmen through the use of a freshman seminar (Rice, 1989).

The PASSPORT variant of Freshman Seminar was specifically designed as a compromise measure between the more extensive (and expensive) concept of a three- or

four-credit, pass-fail course with readings, homework assignments and full-fledged assessment procedures, and the one-day traditional freshman orientation/registration. PASSPORT is based on the Freshman Seminars piloted during the 1996-1997 academic year at four campuses of Baker College. Although the number of participants was small ($n = 108$) in that study, the findings favored the continued use of Freshman Seminar (Thayer, 1997). The students who attended Freshman Seminar showed a seven percent higher class attendance rate and a retention rate 17.67 percent higher than the control group, the students who attended only a traditional, one-day freshman orientation and registration for classes. In addition, the students in the experimental group earned a slightly higher grade point average, 2.88 versus 2.62, on a 4.0 basis. The 1996-1997 Freshman Seminar was intended as an improvement over the former traditional freshman orientation without the extensive commitment of time and resources to a full-quarter Freshman Seminar.

PASSPORT was also planned as the second day of a two-day freshman orientation with faculty presentations and other activities to introduce participants to the various offices and services of the College, followed by additional follow-up, support, contact by faculty, and encouragement. In addition, PASSPORT participants were invited to attend three additional mini-sessions that were offered later in the quarter to cover in more detail the topics of learning styles, self-esteem, and stress management.

PASSPORT

The Baker College System Executive Committee mandated that all campuses offer a Freshman Seminar beginning Fall 1997. It is a voluntary program, not-for-credit, and there is no fee. The program is designed to supplement the traditional freshman

orientation that all new students go through. Traditional freshman orientation at Baker College consists of a videotaped orientation to the College; administration of the Productivity Environmental Preferences Survey (PEPS) and the ASSET; opportunities to sit for waiver tests in English, algebra, and keyboarding; and registration for classes. The Flint campus' Freshman Seminar, PASSPORT, is described as follows:

Examines and assists students in developing skills important to college success. Areas include test-taking skills, note-taking skills, learning styles, time and stress management, study skills techniques, and self-esteem. An introduction to college staff and faculty (is) also . . . incorporated. (Freshman Seminar Syllabus Guide)

Goals of the PASSPORT program on the Flint campus are as follows:

1. To target specific skills, such as time management, good study habits, etc.
2. To give students opportunities to connect with other students, form partnerships
3. To create familiarity with campus, to help students feel comfortable with surroundings
4. To give students a positive representation of the Learning Support Center
5. To give students a more thorough understanding of financial aid, loans, etc.
6. To increase opportunities for student/faculty connections, improve student/faculty relations

7. To reach as many students as possible who have the ability to succeed but who are overwhelmed by it all
8. To present realistic expectations for college life and how to adjust
9. To always keep the student (customer) foremost
10. To increase retention. (Freshman Seminar Syllabus Guide)

The Freshman Seminar Syllabus Guide used by Baker College is attached. It includes **not** only the course description but also a list of materials and a list of Course Outcomes **that** program facilitators are expected to meet.

Retention Activities at Baker College

In 1982, a Retention Committee was formed, along with several other **com**mittees, during the Self-Study period when the College first was accredited by the **Com**mission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of **Col**leges and Schools. Retention efforts have been continuous since. Because the **Col**lege is based on a premise of customer service, there is also an overall attitude that **ass**ists retention. Current efforts include such programs as Student Express, Baker **Ad**vising Days (B.A.D.), Learning Styles, Basic Mathematics modularization, and others. **The** Student Express operates during freshman orientation and registration sessions, both **days** and evenings. Every office a student might need to visit is represented, equipped **with** a computer hooked into the network. Any problem the student may have is taken **care** of on that day without necessitating a trip from office to office. Baker Advising **Days** (B.A.D.) is early registration, also set up in the gymnasium, usually during the sixth **or** seventh week of a quarter, to help students select courses and register for the upcoming

quarter. B. A. D. is staffed by representatives from all offices as well as volunteer faculty members who advise the students.

Learning Styles and Basic Mathematics modularization represent retention efforts from an academic rather than an administrative standpoint. Students are administered the Dunn and Dunn Productivity Environmental Preferences Survey (PEPS) during freshman orientation and registration. All instructors have been trained in Learning Styles and Effective Alternative Teaching Strategies (E.A.T.S.) and most incorporate a variety of modalities in the classroom. Basic Mathematics modularization represents an outcome-based program that is in its third year. All students must pass the eight Basic Mathematics modules to show competency in mathematics before graduation. This has resulted in students having a firmer grasp of fundamentals and has improved their grades in all mathematics courses.

Although many retention programs, such as the examples discussed above and in Chapter Two, indicate their effectiveness in the number of retained students, not all administrators are convinced that such programs are right for their institutions. This was also the case at Baker College when the initial Freshman Seminar pilot was proposed. That program proposal was met with objections by some members of the Executive Committee. The first and most important argument against the use of Freshman Seminar was cost. Many administrators were concerned about funding for this intervention tool because it is obviously very labor-intensive. This objection was overcome by staffing the original Freshman Seminars primarily with non-union salary and hourly employees from the various administrative offices. This measure helped to reduce costs to almost nothing because these employees were given compensation time during non-critical times in

exchange for the extra time they put into Freshman Seminar. For example, an Admissions Counselor who might work an evening Freshman Seminar would be allowed to take the morning off the next day if there were no critical meetings scheduled during that time.

When the PASSPORT committee began planning the program, financial burden was not as much of an issue as in the previous program because of the great success of the 1996-97 Freshman Seminar program. The Executive Committee, being keenly interested in “the bottom line,” could readily see the value of retaining students beyond their first quarter. The results of the 1996-1997 program showed a sharp increase in retention of students who completed the program (76.33 percent of Freshman Seminar participants were retained for a second quarter versus 58.66 percent of those who did not participate). This significant difference in itself was enough to ensure the necessary funding to run the PASSPORT program, a minimal amount in perspective.

A second important objection was raised concerning union difficulties. This concern arose because full-time faculty at every rank at two Baker College campuses (including Flint) are organized and represented by the Michigan Education Association. Administrators were concerned that the use of faculty members during Freshman Seminar might pose contractual problems. Because of ongoing contract negotiations at the time, this was of particular concern. This objection was overcome by piloting Freshman Seminar using staff members rather than relying on faculty from the union bargaining unit. Subsequently, a contract agreement was reached, allowing for the possibility of using facilitators with teaching backgrounds for future efforts.

Staffing decisions were similarly less complicated for PASSPORT than for the earlier Freshman Seminar. Due to the new contract, full-time, senior faculty members who have a keen interest in the success of the program and a strong background in developmental education, student issues, and communication have facilitated the PASSPORT sessions. There were three facilitators, each one facilitating two sessions. Financially, their salary was not a negative factor, as the new contract allows for a reduced teaching load for faculty members involved in special projects. This amounted to hiring an adjunct faculty member to teach the extra classes, costing the College approximately \$4,140 total, for all six sessions that were run in the Fall quarter.

The third and final objection to Freshman Seminar was the sheer logistics of planning and facilitating the extra sessions. The primary inconvenience was for the Facilities Planning Office, whose staff are responsible for assuring rooms and other necessary materials are available as needed for all sessions. In addition, the planning and facilitating of the individual sessions involved many hours by volunteers from the four campuses. Because of the importance of retention, volunteers came forward for the project.

A similar situation evolved for handling the PASSPORT program. An Academic Counselor and an Admissions Counselor co-chaired the Retention Committee's subcommittee that ultimately designed PASSPORT. Because of the success of the 1996-1997 Freshman Seminar program, the Executive Committee budgeted the necessary funds for PASSPORT, which included the faculty release provision, refreshments for PASSPORT participants, and several Baker College promotional items from the campus' public relations office (caps, mousepads, ink pens, etc.) to be used as prizes in the

scavenger hunt. Other costs were normal and routine, such as library cards obtained by students during their PASSPORT sessions, as opposed to later during the quarter as needed for coursework. There was also a volunteer effort that supported the PASSPORT program.

Concept / Design of PASSPORT

At Baker College, the concept of Freshman Seminar was originally investigated by a committee of faculty and administrative staff as a means of improving retention after an administrative support staff member presented the results of her master's thesis on Freshman Seminars to a meeting of the Executive Committee. In the 1995-96 academic year, it was decided to pattern a "mini" Freshman Seminar after the design used by the University of South Carolina, Southeast Missouri State University, North Lake College, North Carolina A & T University, Adirondack Community College, Elon College, and others. Four campuses were asked to pilot a version of Freshman Seminar of their own design and to report back to the System in the Fall 1996 quarter. Stipulations placed upon the individual campuses included a strong emphasis on communications with every department, on the role of the Admissions Department, and on consistency in surveying and tracking students across the System (Freshman Seminar Meeting Minutes, Baker College, October 30, 1996). This method of testing the efficacy of Freshman Seminar was selected to assuage those administrators who raised objections to the use of Freshman Seminar.

Because the 1996-1997 Freshman Seminar pilots were so successful, the Executive Committee mandated that all campuses would offer some version of Freshman Seminar in Fall 1997 to freshman attending orientation; this then is the origin of the

PASSPORT program. The PASSPORT/Freshman Seminar program as designed by the Flint Baker College Retention Committee included the following elements:

- 1. a faculty presentation on time management/goal setting;**
- 2. learning to learn (listening, note taking, and test taking skills);**
- 3. self-management (wellness, stress management, self-esteem, and fears); and**
- 4. a scavenger hunt incorporating visits to the Learning Support Center, the Library, the Financial Aid office, the Business Office, restrooms, Campus Safety, the Bookstore, and the Student Center.**

These elements were chosen based on Duhamé's (1994) and Thayer's (1997) recommendations of what would most benefit the student population and on Academic Counselors' reports of the reasons given for withdrawal from college, information customarily solicited from students who officially withdraw from the College.

PASSPORT sessions were conducted August 1 (day), August 20 (evening), September 12 (day), September 17 (day and evening) and October 4 (Saturday). Each session was scheduled for four hours in length; this was in addition to the four hours of freshman orientation and registration. The dates themselves were distributed over a several week period in an attempt to control for the assumption that more highly motivated students might attend earlier orientation sessions and less motivated, possibly less prepared students would attend later in the summer or would register after classes began September 29.

In keeping with the importance of congruence of goals, as discussed in Chapter Two, PASSPORT program participants learn where the Academic Office is and must request a copy of their step-plan during the PASSPORT scavenger hunt. This document

is personalized for each student, including his or her previous academic grades and all courses that must be completed in his or her chosen field of study. It is hoped that having a step-plan from the very beginning of the students' academic career will encourage them to think about their own futures and how Baker College can help them achieve their goals.

The importance of involvement in the college community through extracurricular activities has always been encouraged as something that "looks good on a resume," but the research (Astin, 1993; Tinto 1993) also points out the persistence advantage of involvement. Thus, PASSPORT participants were strongly encouraged to join at least one club or become involved in some extracurricular activity at the college. These opportunities were also highlighted during a Club Day event that took place early in the quarter. It was hoped that students who attended PASSPORT would be exposed to information that would underscore the importance of involvement and that they would in turn become more involved, feel more integrated into the college community, and be more likely to persist than students who did not attend PASSPORT.

A final element of PASSPORT that was predicted to improve retention was the skills section, including study skills, stress reduction techniques, and time management tips. Based on current research, primarily surveys of Freshman Seminar programs conducted by Fidler (1992) and Barefoot (1993), these learning-to-learn elements of metacognition have been incorporated. They were discussed during PASSPORT, during follow-up sessions, and in a supplemental handout distributed to participants. It was hoped that participation in the PASSPORT program would lead to improved study skills,

stress reduction skills, and time management skills, which in turn were predicted to improve student retention.

The Baker College Student Population

The Baker College of Flint student can be broken down into the following sub-populations (also see Table 1, next page): There were 3,934 students enrolled at Baker College of Flint in the Fall of 1997; approximately one-third of them (1,332) were new students, 417 probationary (re-entering) students, and 2,185 returning students. Of these, 2,211 (56.20 percent) were registered as primarily day students and 1,723 (43.80 percent) were registered as night students. By gender, there were 1,186 (30.10 percent) males and 2,748 (69.90 percent) females. By status, 2,058 (52.30 percent) of these students were enrolled full time; 1,876 (47.70 percent) were enrolled part time. By ethnicity, 571 (14.51 percent) students indicated themselves to be black; 35 (.89 percent) were native American; 102 (2.59 percent) were Asian; 55 (1.40 percent) were Hispanic; 2,890 (73.46 percent) were white; and 281 (7.14 percent) were unknown. By credit hour earned (class standing), the breakdown was as follows: non-degree, full time--64, part time--319; freshman, full time--719, part time--358; freshman, other, full time--411, part time 442; sophomore, full time--563, part time--531; junior, full time--160, part time--130; senior, full time--141, part time--96 (Baker College-Flint Fall Quarter 1997 IPEDS [Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data Systems] report).

**Table 1: Baker College-Flint Student Demographics
Fall Quarter 1997**

	<u>Day</u>	<u>Evening</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
New Students	824	508	1,332	33.9 %
Re-enter (Admissions)	30	40	70	1.7 %
Re-enter (Academics)	157	190	347	8.8 %
Returning Students	1,200	985	2,185	55.5 %
TOTAL	2,211	1,723	3,934	99.9 %
Percent	56.2%	43.8%	100 %	
<u>Gender:</u>				
Male	1,186	Female	2,748	
<u>Race:</u>				
Caucasian	2,890			
African-American	571			
Asian	102			
Hispanic	55			
Native American	35			
Unknown	281			
<u>Enrollment Status:</u>				
Full-time	2,058			
Part-time	1,876			
Non-degree, full-time	64			
Non-degree, part-time	319			
<u>Class Standing by Enrollment Status:</u>				
Freshman, full-time	1,130			
Freshman, part-time	780			
Sophomore, full-time	563			
Sophomore, part-time	531			
Junior, full-time	160			
Junior, part-time	130			
Senior, full-time	141			
Senior, part-time	96			

Research Questions

Students from the Flint campus of Baker College who attended one or both programs (freshman orientation only vs. freshman orientation with follow-up PASSPORT program) were compared. The question was whether the extra investment of time, talent, and money entailed by PASSPORT would reap the dividend of higher student retention rates from the Fall quarter to Winter. In other words, the primary research question in this study was: Does PASSPORT make a difference in student retention at Baker College?

There were both quantitative and qualitative components in this study.

Specifically, the following sub-questions were examined:

5. Will the students in the PASSPORT program report having learned more academic skills (such as study skills and library research skills) than students who have gone through only traditional freshman orientation?
6. Will students who have gone through PASSPORT complete their first quarter at Baker College and return for a second quarter at a rate higher than that of students who have gone through only traditional freshman orientation?
7. Will students who have gone through PASSPORT report a higher rate of satisfaction (belongingness) with their entry into college life than students who have gone through only traditional freshman orientation?
8. Will students who have gone through the PASSPORT program show a lower incidence of academic referral (have their name sent to the Academic Office in an Exception Report for earning a C- or lower grade) at midterm than the students who have gone through only the traditional freshman orientation?

The secondary research question, if PASSPORT does make a difference, was: How does PASSPORT make a difference? Specifically, the following sub-questions were examined:

5. What will the participants perceive to be the outcomes from the PASSPORT program?
6. How will PASSPORT affect participants' confidence in using college resources, such as the Computer Labs, the Learning Support Center, and the library, as compared to students who attended only freshman orientation?
7. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the PASSPORT program, as identified by participants?
8. What suggestions will PASSPORT participants make for improving the program or for instituting other options?

Conceptual Framework

Tinto's (1975, 1993) model of institutional departure (discussed in Chapter Two) examines pre-entry attributes, institutional experiences, reactions and decisions. Pre-entry attributes include family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling. All subjects in this study were asked to complete a 22-item questionnaire to control for some of these attributes that might affect the results, i.e., motivation, family background, gender, and race. Although an insufficient number of surveys were returned to be included in this study, it is important to note that, over time these pre-entry attributes affect the student's goals and institutional commitments, leading to the decision to attend college, specifically, to attend Baker College. The central part of the model, institutional experiences, is the part PASSPORT is designed to impact. Specifically, PASSPORT is

intended as an intervention to encourage more interaction between participants and other members of the Baker College community: faculty in and outside of class, various support staff, other students in and outside of class, and various members of extracurricular activities and organizations.

Since Tinto (1975, 1993) has concluded that interaction with faculty, staff and students is the strongest predictor of student persistence, this is a key component in the PASSPORT program. Participants were encouraged to initiate contact with faculty members and other students both in and outside class. In addition, PASSPORT participants were encouraged to seek assistance as soon as possible with the appropriate staff member whenever a problem arose with financial aid, the bursar's office, academics, research assignments, or any other area.

Study Design

This study examined these themes using secondary data collected by Baker College in the following design:

1. **Surveys**: There were three survey instruments that were collected by the College but returned in insufficient number;
2. **Interviews**: Students who were involved either in freshman orientation and registration only or in both freshman orientation/registration and PASSPORT were interviewed during the Winter quarter. Interview data were analyzed thematically. (See discussion of the Interview Guide below.)
3. **Institutional and Personal Data**: Baker College collected Midterm Exception Reports (listing names of students who have achieved a grade of C- or lower by the end of Week 5) and statistics on retention of freshmen from the Fall into Winter quarter. I

also collected students' high school grade point averages and demographics on the two groups.

This study's design is based conceptually on Tinto's (1975, 1993) model, primarily focusing on components of the model that deal with institutional experiences. It is here that the student's formal and informal interactions take place, influencing the student's personal/normative integration, goals and commitments, and ultimately, his or her departure decision. The PASSPORT program at Baker College was designed to influence the student's experiences in such a way that the student will ultimately decide to stay in school. The goals of PASSPORT include encouraging informal interactions between students and faculty and staff members, helping participants meet other students to encourage informal peer-group interactions, and introducing participants to extra-curricular activities on a formal level. If these goals were met, theoretically, PASSPORT participants experienced a higher rate of academic and social integration into the College community, thus strengthening their goals, intentions, and institutional commitments. This in turn influenced students' decision to re-enroll and to persist, it is hoped, until graduation.

Sample

All entering students, including transfers, are required to attend a freshman orientation. During Fall 1997 sessions, students were informed of the PASSPORT program components and were invited to volunteer for the additional intervention. Students were also invited to attend three follow-up support sessions (called Excursions, in keeping with the overall travel theme) held throughout the quarter, and some PASSPORT sessions were designated "Reach Out" sessions; these sessions' participants

were telephoned by the PASSPORT facilitator at least three times and contacted by mail at least once during their first quarter in attendance at Baker College. Due to the confusing nature of all the different groups, the lack of follow-up data available, and the small number of the Excursions groups, the data from these two groups were not included in this study.

Although the influence of timeliness was addressed (a concern that more motivated students would attend sessions early in the summer and less motivated students, later), one limitation in this study is the volunteer method by which the experimental group was selected. There were 176 students who volunteered to attend a PASSPORT session, 78 of whom actually attended. These comprised the experimental group in this study. The group of 98 who signed up but did not attend PASSPORT (referred to below as PASSPORT non-attendees) will be briefly considered. These students volunteered to attend a session but either did not arrive when scheduled or were placed on a waiting list because the session they had selected to attend was full. A control group of 78 freshmen was selected randomly from the pool of students who attended only traditional freshman orientation. A matched sample was not used due to time constraints inherent in the data processing and records management systems in use at Baker College. Table 2 shows the demographics of these two groups. Both groups have an average age of just over 27 years, a median age of approximately 24 years, and similar ranges of ages. In addition, the groups are somewhat similar racially. The only significant difference between the two groups is in the gender composition; the nonPASSPORT sample group has twice as many males as the PASSPORT group has. This gender difference indicates PASSPORT may have been more appealing to females,

an implication that will be discussed in Chapter Five. Data from the 78 PASSPORT participants were compared to those of the randomly selected group of 78 students who attended only a traditional freshman orientation and registration (see Table 2, below).

**Table 2: Baker College-Flint PASSPORT Study Demographics
Fall 1997**

	PASSPORT group n = 78	nonPASSPORT sample n = 78
average age	27.35	27.28
median age	24.5	24.6
range of ages	19 - 50	16 - 51
Male	15	29
female	63	49
Caucasian	56	52
African-American	13	11
Asian	9	10
Unknown	0	5

Source: Primary

Methodology: Quantitative Measures

Surveys

The students who attended a PASSPORT session were surveyed by the College after the initial session. Questions on the initial 22-item survey included items to allow for the control of family background, motivation, race, gender, and previous academic history. The week-eight survey included a Likert-scale questionnaire intended to determine the students' level of satisfaction with their college experience and with the PASSPORT program or with freshman orientation. It was my intention to analyze the survey data as part of this study to determine the students' satisfaction with the experience. My hypothesis was that the students who went through the PASSPORT

program (the independent variable) would report a higher level of satisfaction with their initial quarter in college and would feel more knowledgeable about dealing with the setbacks encountered in academe (dependent variables). Insufficient surveys were returned, prohibiting the use of multiple regression analysis, or, indeed, the use of the data in any way. Thus, the discussion in Chapter Four concerning satisfaction is drawn entirely from the interviews.

Statistical Data

Data collected by the Academic Office staff for analysis and inclusion in this study included the Exception Reports and statistics for the Winter and Spring 1998 quarters retention of freshmen. Data were collected at three times for both groups: at midterm of the Fall 1997 quarter, after final grades were posted for the quarter, and after the first week of the Winter 1998 quarter. Exception Reports were analyzed to learn which group was reported for academic deficiencies at midterm. Both groups' average grade point average were calculated and compared. Finally, the retention rate at the end of Week One of Winter 1998 for both groups was examined.


Midterm Exception Reports were examined to compare academic deficiencies, that is, any differences in the rate at which students were referred to the Academic Counselors for earning a grade of "C-" or lower. My hypothesis was that the students who went through the PASSPORT program would show a lower incidence of referral at midterm than the students who went through only the traditional freshman orientation. This hypothesis was based on my belief that the added support and intervention given by PASSPORT would not hurt the students' academic efforts and would most likely help them; there would be a correlation between the independent variable (attendance at

PASSPORT sessions) and the dependent variable (incidence of being named to their instructors' exception reports). Also, students' final grade point averages at the end of the Fall 1997 quarter were included in this study and compared to the students' group grade point average from high school in an attempt to determine if there was a connection between students' achievement in high school and their achievement during their first quarter at Baker College.

In addition, the rate of return (persistence beyond the first quarter) for the Winter and Spring 1998 quarters was examined. My hypothesis was that the students from the PASSPORT program would be retained for a second and third quarter at a higher rate than the students from traditional freshman orientation; there would be a relationship between the independent variable (attendance at PASSPORT) and the dependent variables (the rate of persistence, i.e., whether the student persists through the end of the first quarter; and returning for a subsequent quarter). I was particularly interested in this finding because of the high number of students who begin at the College every fall quarter but who typically do not complete their first quarter or who complete one quarter but do not return for a subsequent quarter. This is a trend PASSPORT was designed to reverse.

Data Analysis and Controls

Insufficient surveys were returned, precluding regression analysis of quantitative data. The initial survey instrument contained 22 items designed to allow for control for family background, motivation, race, gender, and previous academic history. Student volunteers were recruited for participation in PASSPORT, so there may be an element of self-selection; that is, the PASSPORT program may contain a high proportion of



unusually motivated or academically talented students who were predisposed to self-select the additional intervention because of their motivation or talent. I analyzed the two groups' high school records as a means of determining the probability that this phenomenon was at work; those results are discussed in Chapter Four.

Methodology: Interviews

This study also employed some qualitative questions to investigate the use of **PASSPORT** as a retention tool. Of those entering freshmen who returned to Baker College for Winter quarter, twelve volunteers from each group were solicited to be interviewed individually and tape recorded for approximately one-half hour in an effort to determine the relationship of the independent variable (attendance at **PASSPORT**) to the dependent variables: the students' coping abilities; use of resources; confidence in study skills, library skills, and computer literacy skills; and interaction with faculty members. (Please see the interview protocol in the appendix.) In addition, twelve volunteers from each of the two groups were interviewed about their initial quarter experiences, as were two dropouts. Volunteers were recruited using a tear-off form at the end of the post-**PASSPORT** Likert scale questionnaire. Because there were insufficient volunteers, a random selection of students was conducted to select interview subjects, including two drop-outs, for a total of 26 interview subjects. Qualitative data were collected from those interviews, including student perceptions about their own satisfaction with their college experiences and suggestions for improving the program.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was designed with questions about several themes that were discussed in Chapter Two. I asked why the students chose Baker College

(Questions 1, 2, 15, and 16) to determine if the students' goals were congruent with the College's mission and purposes and to gain insight into the students' intentions and commitments (Tinto, 1993). I included questions to determine the students' metacognition (Brown, 1989; Noel and Levitz, 1997; Tinto, 1993)—their ability to understand instructions, their ability to predict their ability to follow directions and allocate study time and resources, their knowledge of strategies, and their ability to use strategies (Questions 3-6, 14, 17, and 25). Because so many students are unprepared for the transition to college (Boyer, 1987), I solicited specific examples from the students about how their freshman program helped them in their adjustment to college (Questions 3 and 17). I asked the students how the information from PASSPORT and/or freshman orientation and registration affected their beliefs and/or behaviors during their first quarter in college (Questions 7 and 18) in conjunction with Tinto's assertion that it is the student's perception that is the key (1993). Because of Gordon's conclusion that freshman seminar programs can lead to a greater satisfaction with the college experience (1991), I asked the students if they would recommend the program (either PASSPORT or the type of orientation they went through) to others (see Questions 8 and 19) and whether they would suggest any improvements (Questions 9 and 20). I also tried to gain an understanding of the students' perception of their integration by asking them if they had ever heard the expression, "the Baker family" and about their role at Baker (see Questions 10 and 21). I then followed with questions designed to learn about the students' isolation versus belongingness (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993) by asking about their contacts with Baker employees (see Questions 11 and 22). I also inquired about their involvement in extracurricular activities (Questions 12 and 23), as

suggested by Astin's Theory of Involvement, the notion that involvement and energy lead to learning, retention, and persistence. Finally, to gain an understanding of the extent to which PASSPORT and/or freshman orientation and registration may have helped overcome the students' underpreparedness, I asked them why they returned to Baker College for a second quarter, if there had been some point when they thought they wouldn't make it, what they did, and what made them so confident (Questions 13, 14, 24, and 25). This was of serious concern to me, not only because it was important to my results but also because colleges with open-door policies often have a disproportionately large population of underprepared students, a situation for which freshman seminars are an appropriate measure (Rice, 1989). In addition, I was hoping to discover some degree of satisfaction with the first-quarter experience, since the combination of the students' intentions and commitments with positive experiences often is a predictor of retention (Tinto, 1993).

Students who volunteered to be interviewed made appointments and reported to my office to be interviewed. I selected my office as the interview site for several reasons (Kvale, 1996, p. 162). It is a comfortable space (according to students who have visited me there in the past). It is also at the end of a hallway where there is little traffic or noise. In addition, it is private, lending itself well to confidentiality.

Tape recording, "the usual way of recording interviews today," (Kvale, 1996, p. 160) was chosen over videotaping due to ease of operation, size of interview area, and ease of analysis. Interview tapes were transcribed using a voice dictation software program (Dragon Naturally Speaking) with my personal home computer. The interviews

were conducted in my office, located in the Faculty Office at Baker College of Flint, using the following outline (adapted from Kvale, 1996, pp. 127-128):

1. Briefing: After putting the subject at ease, I told him/her the purpose of the interview, announced that I would be using a tape recorder and taking notes, asked if there are any questions before we started, and turned on the tape recorder. Subjects gave permission using the UCRIHS consent form (See Appendix).
2. Interview: During this time I was at ease and clear about the purpose, showing interest, understanding, and respect for the subject's responses.
3. Summarize and Provide Feedback: I "wrapped it up" and asked if there were any other comments or questions.
4. Debrief: After turning off the tape recorder, I told the subject more fully about the purpose and design of the study.
5. Reflection: I left myself 10-15 minutes following each interview to jot down my impressions about the subject's body language and an overall sense of the individual interview.

Transcription and Analysis

The bulk of the data for this study was collected in the interviews. I used the **Dragon Naturally Speaking** software, a continuous speech recognition program, and my **computer** to transcribe the tapes verbatim. I then coded the evidence thematically to **determine** students' satisfaction with the PASSPORT program or freshman seminar and **their views** on other interventions that they identified as potentially helpful. Because I **was** interested in their initial college experience, I concentrated on their level of

satisfaction with PASSPORT and how it prepared them for college as well as how the experience had changed their lives. As I mentioned above, I was looking in particular for evidence of the students' perception of belongingness, quality of contacts, and integration into the College community, as well as reasons why they chose to attend Baker and to persist. The thesaurus I developed guided my analysis, and is included in the appendix.

As part of my analysis of the interviews, I attempted to gain a description from the students' perspective of their first-quarter experiences, particularly how the freshman orientation and registration and/or PASSPORT impacted their lives. I reduced the interview texts to thematic formulations and verified the findings using triangulation (Kvale, 1996, p. 219), i.e., I checked the few surveys against the interview data as well as invited the subjects to read the interview transcripts for accuracy. I edited the transcripts as little as possible, primarily editing out asides, idiosyncrasies in speech, and redundancies. The majority of the students returned their transcripts to me unedited, although some (eight) did some editing before returning the copies to me. As I incorporated the exemplars (the premier examples) in Chapter Four, I marked each with a code for ease of understanding: PP, nPP, or other, to designate PASSPORT, nonPASSPORT, and the "other" group that evolved, respectively.

Role of the Researcher

Although I had served on the planning committee of both the original freshman seminar and PASSPORT, I declined an opportunity to serve as a program facilitator because of a concern that any such involvement would contaminate the findings of this study. As I conducted interviews, I made a concerted effort to emphasize my role as a graduate student from Michigan State University in order to de-emphasize my role as a

member of the Baker College faculty. Although I also harbored a concern that the students would not be completely honest with me (e.g., not open up to me about some negative aspect of Baker College), this did not seem to be a problem. The students seemed to be relaxed and candid with me, judging by the variety of responses (negative and positive) to the questions posed during the interviews.

I was also concerned about the possibility of bias on my part when analyzing the interview data due to my being employed by Baker College. As part of the teaching and administration staff, I have worked at and been involved in freshman orientation and registration in the past, and continue to be involved in its implementation. It is for this reason that I employed peer debriefing, "asking a colleague to comment on the findings as they emerge" (Merriam, 1988, p. 169). I asked a group of experts from the College to look at my work for subjectivity in my analyses. I refer to this group in Chapters Four and Five as the Baker Brain Trust.

As a Baker College faculty member, I was sensitive to issues that arose during the interviews. I conducted the interviews in my office because many students and other faculty members have told me that it is a comfortable, private environment. It is possible, however, that students may have felt inhibited and may not have wanted to share negative feelings about the College because they were aware that I work there. I felt I was able to establish a good rapport with the students and make them understand that I was there to improve the process and that I needed their input--both positive and negative--if I am to succeed in that goal. In addition, because I work at the College, I feel I was able to rely on my reputation as an instructor who is approachable.

Role of “Baker Brain Trust”

On April 9 I met with an “expert group,” the PASSPORT committee at Baker College to discuss some of the preliminary results from this study. These were all Baker College employees who had a close, working knowledge of the PASSPORT program—the Vice President for Academics, the Learning Support Center director, the three faculty facilitators, and other key employees who had been actively involved. This committee agreed with my conclusions and brainstormed some recommendations based on their experiences and the preliminary findings I shared with them. Some of these ideas are included below (in Chapter Five).

Summary

To summarize, in this chapter I have discussed the site of this research, including a description of the PASSPORT program and other retention activities at Baker College. In addition, I have explained the research questions, conceptual underpinning, and the study design. In the next chapter I will provide the results of the study, which support many of the hypotheses discussed here.

CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the results of this study, piecing together the various **data** to present an overview of how the PASSPORT program impacted students' **academic** careers at Baker College. I will present the actual retention statistics, students' **grade** point averages by group, and the results of my examination of the Exception **Reports**, as well as the data collected during the 26 half-hour interviews I conducted in **my office** at Baker College during February and March 1998. These data present a fairly **complete** picture of this study. I will discuss the data in the order of the main research **questions**: first, I will look at the retention rate of the two groups I studied; second, I will **look at** the students' satisfaction and other data uncovered during the interview process; **finally**, I will look at the other statistics I gathered in this study, including the students' **exception** report grades and their final grades for the Fall 1997 quarter.

(Please note: Exemplars, premier examples, end with a code, PP or nPP to **designate** PASSPORT or nonPASSPORT, respectively. Representative comments are **presented** here from each group where possible.)

Retention Statistics

The first research question for this study was: Will students who participate in **PASSPORT** be more likely to complete their first quarter in college and return for a **second** quarter than those students who participate only in a traditional freshman **orientation**? An analysis of the return rate of new students in the Winter 1998 quarter, **calculated** at the end of Week 1 of the Winter quarter, shows that PASSPORT students

returned at a higher rate than nonPASSPORT students. (See Table 3) Of all of the Fall 1997 PASSPORT students (n=78), 83.3 percent returned to Baker College for a second quarter and 72 percent for a third quarter. Only 74 percent of the nonPASSPORT students returned for the Winter quarter and 58.5 percent returned for the Spring quarter. *The* differences in the retention rates for these two groups were found to be statistically *significant*, at a very high level, using a Z-test (no difference = 0).

Table 3: Baker College of Flint Entering Freshman Retention
1997-1998, by Group

	PASSPORT group n = 78	nonPASSPORT sample n = 78	Z-test of significance
Winter retention	83.3 %	74 %	14.2
Spring retention	72 %	58.5 %	12.7

(Source: Primary)

Reasons for Choosing Baker College

The students interviewed for this study gave a variety of reasons for their decision to attend college as well as for their choice of Baker College. One adult student mentioned the need to make changes in her life so that she would be better able to support herself and her children. Another reason cited by students was the advertising they had seen or received about Baker. Some students who did not specifically mention the advertising used words similar to the current advertising slogan, "You'll do better at Baker!" One student cited advanced knowledge of the PASSPORT program as one of the reasons she chose Baker:

(An admissions representative) said there's a program called PASSPORT to learn where your room is, and how to do it, and to sign up for classes,

and I thought, that takes care of a lot of anxiety. None of the other schools had that. (PP)

Other reasons included convenience (closeness to home), a nontransferable scholarship, **the** College's reputation as a career college, congruence with the College's mission, **friendship**, and appropriate majors.

Convenience

It is common knowledge that many students choose colleges for reasons other **than** academics. Students choose a college because of location, scholarships, or friends; **Baker** College students are no exception. As one student said, "I didn't even check **around**, to be honest with you. I live around here." (PP) Because there are other **colleges** in the city, including a community college and a major university, there are other **reasons** Baker College is the choice made by the students. For many students, the smaller **size of** the college is an important consideration and is also cited as a reason for choosing **Baker**. As one student who had investigated other colleges said,

I felt like I didn't want to be counted as just a number. I wanted to be able to talk to a professor during office hours but not have an auditorium-type lecture. (PP)

One student cited the availability and convenience of the online degree program that has **been** widely advertised in the Flint area.

Academic Scholarships

Only two students chose to attend Baker because of a scholarship that did not **transfer**. One student who had recently completed adult high school said, "A full **scholarship** from my other school [led to my decision to attend Baker.] I went to adult

education, and they gave me a scholarship to attend Baker.” (PP) However, after attending Baker for only one quarter, both students indicated a high degree of satisfaction with their initial college experience.

Congruence of Students’ Goals with College’s Mission

“The mission of the Baker College system is to provide quality higher education which enables graduates to be successful throughout challenging and rewarding careers” (1997-1998 Undergraduate and Graduate Catalog, p. 4). This mission statement is widely used throughout all freshman orientation programs as well as during recruiting tours conducted by the Admissions Department. While it seemed obvious to me during the interviews that students are aware of this mission and how their own goals are congruent with the mission, this is a fairly generic mission statement that could fit most students. Three students mentioned the availability of the programs they were interested in; one student also mentioned the need “to further my education and to get a nice stable job.” The desire to get a job was a theme repeated throughout many of the interviews, or as one student said, “Because it is a career college, it wouldn’t take as long for me to graduate and go on to get a job.” (PP) Thus, a recurrent theme of why students chose Baker was its reputation as a career college, where students take only necessary classes to earn an associate degree in order to attain an entry-level job:

I picked Baker because it had a better business program, and it was either Baker or [the community college]. Baker has more business classes and better business classes. I went to the school that had the most and the best.
(PP)

As another student expressed: “Baker seemed like a good career private college, so that’s why I decided to go to Baker.”

The fact that Baker offered programs students were interested in was also cited by some students I spoke with. As one student said,

I’m going for engineering so I checked around to all the different colleges and this one seemed to be what I had in mind so I could get out and do my job the quickest. (nPP)

In another student’s words: “. . . the surgical tech program was here.” The emphasis on skills was also evident in the interviews; as one other student expressed it, “I decided to get medical transcription skills.” This emphasis on discreet workplace skills is another feature of Baker’s emphasis on education for careers.

Two students talked about attending Baker as their chance to make something of themselves. One said she decided to attend Baker

because I knew I wanted something better out of life besides what everybody else was doing. I wanted to become something. I wasn’t quite sure what, but I knew I wanted more. (nPP)

The other student said, “I always wanted to attend college because I wanted to succeed.

In my family, of my mom’s kids, I’m the first person to go to college.” (PP) With approximately eighty percent of all Baker College of Flint students receiving some form of financial aid (McCarty, 1998), the majority of students attend with hope for a better life that depends upon a college degree.

In addition to the adult students and the traditional-age students I interviewed for this study, there were two minors. These two students (from the control group) were

home-schooled minors (of a group of 29 enrolled in Fall 1997) whose parents enrolled **them** in one or more classes at Baker College for dual credit, counting for both high **school** and college credit. The parents chose Baker because of its open door policy and **other** policies toward home schooled students. Both students indicated the reason they **had** returned to Baker College for a second quarter was to earn more credits that could be **used** for both high school and college credit.

Friendship / Belongingness as a Reason for Choosing Baker College

One student explained her reason for choosing Baker College: “Well, a couple of **my** friends wanted to start coming here to Baker. . . . A friend of mine went to Baker and **she** said it was a really nice college.” (PP) Another student said her reason for choosing **Baker** was

. . . because me and my best friend, we had both applied to Baker because we didn’t want to go to the junior college at home so I applied here and I got accepted. (PP)

The desire to attend college where one had friends was also cited by another **nonPASSPORT** student who said, “I have a lot of friends that had gone to Baker and they **all** had decent jobs.” (PP)

Levels of Apprehension about Beginning College

Because of the volume of literature that concluded many students are underprepared for **the** transition to college, and because I wanted to gain a sense for the students’ initial **perception** of college, I asked my interview subjects if they felt any apprehension about **starting** college. Ten of the students I interviewed, primarily PASSPORT participants,

reported they felt no apprehension at starting college. Of the remaining 16, five mentioned the word “scared,” while only two used the word “nervous.” One student was **able** to articulate her fear very succinctly:

... you always hear people talking about college. It’s hard; you have to be extra smart to go, and I did (well) in high school, but I didn’t figure (my) graduating in the top ten was good enough to go to college. (PP)

Because the average age of the Baker College student and the PASSPORT **participant** specifically is about 28 years, I was particularly interested to hear how the **older** students felt about starting college. One adult student said,

I was scared to death! About studying and tests, especially, tests. That was the big thing. I figured there would be a lot of younger students. Being middle-aged, not able to fit in. That I wouldn’t be able to keep up. I’m a mom. My life is my kids and working and taking care of my home. I was afraid that I wouldn’t be current, with things that are going on in the world, things that are happening. The Internet scares me. (PP)

This concern about not being current or knowledgeable about technology in particular **was common** among the adult students I interviewed. Another common fear, that of not **fitting in** with the younger students (Tinto, 1993) was echoed by another older student, **who said**, “... it’s been twenty some years since I went (to high school), so it was just a **little scary** about having to come back.” (PP) Yet another adult student, when asked if **she felt** any apprehension, said, “Sure. My age was a factor, not knowing if I’d be able to **cut it or not**.” (nPP) Aside from this study, it has been my experience that many adult **students** feel they are simply too old to learn, as in the adage, “You can’t teach an old dog

new tricks.” I have found in my own teaching practice that a series of small accomplishments in the classroom often helps to overcome this sentiment. Another student had a little more difficulty putting her fear into words:

I just wondered whether or not I was making the right choice as to which field I was going into. Whether I had made the right decision. Whether I had chosen the right college. (PP)

Reasons for Choosing to Attend PASSPORT

Because of the inadequate number of surveys returned for this study, it became increasingly important to me to gain a sense for why the students had chosen to attend PASSPORT. Those students who had selected PASSPORT indicated a variety of reasons for having done so. Five students volunteered because of the possibility of gaining a connection with other students, the opportunity to meet other students before classes began. Seven students wanted to “get a feel for the college,” “learn the layout,” or “learn the how to's of college.” Two students cited simply that attending PASSPORT was suggested by an Admissions representative. One student mentioned her reason for attending PASSPORT was the fact that it was free, so she had nothing to lose: “It was suggested somewhere along the line, so I figured, why not? It was free.” Two students were interested in learning about basic study tips. Finally, one student felt very fearful about beginning college, and hoped PASSPORT would help overcome that fear, an advertised goal of the program. One theme that appears is the helpfulness to the adult learner throughout the students’ comments.

Overcoming Apprehension

For many students, the biggest incentive to attend PASSPORT was the advertised **goal** of overcoming nervousness. One student said simply, “I knew it was for freshmen **and** I just thought it would really help me, being new here. The way it was presented, it **sounded** (helpful).” PASSPORT promised a number of features that encouraged students **to attend**. As another student stated, the advertised benefits included overcoming **nervousness**, meeting other students, and cultivating a feeling of belongingness:

That [PASSPORT] was voluntary. [I attended] just because I was nervous about starting. And I was so nervous during orientation that I thought I was gonna be really nervous for my first class. Plus I thought, the more people I see, the more faces that are familiar. . . . I thought that would help. And it does. It makes you feel like you’re familiar with somebody.

Like you belong more. (PP)

While this comment seems more applicable to the section on connectedness than to **overcoming** apprehension, I think it is exactly this sentiment that illustrates the need for **programs** like this one. The student who feels connected is also less apprehensive and is **more** likely to remain enrolled.

Another advertised feature of PASSPORT that appealed to many students I **interviewed** was the preparation for college-level work, a review of the basics of **studying**, time management, and coping with stress. One student simply said,

I signed up for PASSPORT because I knew I needed the basics to start back to school. It had been a long time [since high school] and even back then I didn’t know how to study. (PP)

This aspect appealed to another adult student, who said,

Well, I read some of the criteria of what it was supposed to help us with, like how to study for exams, how to study your homework, how to schedule your time, so I just wanted to get a little bit more insight into that so I could improve myself once classes did start. (PP)

Desire for Connectedness

In apparent agreement with Tinto's (1975, 1993) emphasis on the importance of **integration** into the college community, several students talked about attending **PASSPORT** with the objective of gaining a connection. One student said she signed up **for PASSPORT**,

to get the overall look of the school. I never really heard anything about Baker except the slogan, "Your future begins with Baker," but I had to get a feel for the school. (PP)

A second student gave a similar rationale for attending:

Because our (referring to her and a friend's) academic advisor told us it would be good for us. It would show us around the college and introduce us to other freshmen that were coming here for the first time. (PP)

Another student expressed a similar motivation:

I didn't know the layout, I didn't know where things are. I wanted to meet other people. Sometimes my social skills aren't good. And I thought, if there was any opportunity to get with other people, then that would be a good thing. So that was my hidden agenda; I wanted to meet other

students. In fact, today in the hallway I met somebody and I reminded them, “Hey! Weren’t you in my PASSPORT? (PP)

All three of these comments support the view that knowledge of physical surroundings and meeting other people can be incorporated into the notion of connectedness. That is, familiarity with surroundings and with other students are strong indicators of integration and predictors of persistence (Tinto, 1993).

Perceptions of Benefits of PASSPORT and Freshman Orientation Programs

The interview data indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the PASSPORT program as well as strong integrative elements that have resulted, perhaps indirectly, due to the PASSPORT program. I asked the students I interviewed if PASSPORT had met their expectations. All said it had. When asked to describe the PASSPORT session students had attended, the students remembered a variety of features. All twelve of the students I interviewed who had attended PASSPORT described helpful features of the program. Seven students mentioned the word *informative*; two students specifically mentioned the scavenger hunt; three students recalled the tour of the building; four students cited having learned study tips; one student mentioned time management; one specifically recalled having visited the learning support center; and two students mentioned the availability of services that were discussed.

Familiarity with Campus

One student felt she hadn’t needed to learn about study tips that were presented but was happy to learn the layout of the campus. As she said, “Mine [the benefit I liked] was getting shown around the school. That was what was important to me.” This student

also mentioned this feature as the one that most helped her overcome her apprehensions.

She laughed as she said,

The fact that I was being shown around the school, so I wouldn't be looking like I didn't know where I was going. So that helped me feel more comfortable and more acclimated to my surroundings And I haven't gotten lost, not even once (PP)

A key feature of the PASSPORT program was a scavenger hunt, designed to **familiarize** student with the building and services available. One student, in trying to **recall** if the program had met her expectations said, "I don't remember what they told me **it** would be like but I found the Scavenger Hunt real fun." In assessing how the program **had** helped with her apprehensions, she said, "Their (faculty and staff) confidence in the **students**. The introduction of everyone onboard, such as counselors, advisors, stuff like **that**. . . . I felt like I could go to people for help." Another student who felt the Scavenger **Hunt** was helpful said,

I remember doing the Treasure Hunt, which was very helpful because that gets you to know where everything is. You have to get something from each office. And I really liked that because that's how I knew where the library was. I memorized how our little group went. That's what helped me know where things are. (PP)

For adult students, the fear of looking lost and feeling foolish seemed to be a key factor **that** encouraged them to attend PASSPORT. This is consistent with the theories of **Malcolm Knowles** (1980) which emphasize the dignity of the adult student. Becoming **familiar** with the building also lends itself to a feeling of connectedness. The two--relief

from apprehension and the feeling of having a connection--are interrelated in some students' minds. As one student said,

I did tour the College. They took us through some of the classrooms. The degree that I was wanting to go for was Medical Assistant . . . (and) we had gone up there and looked at the room. That was really interesting; it was a lot like a doctor's office. That was kinda neat . . . I was not quite as nervous my first day, if I had not have taken PASSPORT. It eased my tension just a little bit. (PP)

Students' Reports of Connectedness

One adult student felt strongly that PASSPORT helped her in her transition to **college** in several ways. She said,

I [realized I] wasn't the oldest one. My age was the most common age (28), more so than you know (meaning she was surprised that there were so many older, adult students and that 18-year olds did not constitute the majority of the student population). I was a lot more at home, I was more at ease. I knew the building and I knew where to go when I . . . needed help. I knew who to go to. The thing that I love about here is, even if you go to the wrong place, they'll just tell you where to go. It doesn't matter. And so it made me feel a lot more secure and like I belong. That's what PASSPORT did; it made me feel like I could belong, like I was joining a family. (PP)

It is interesting to note that this comment was made *before* I asked, "Have you ever heard a faculty member or someone else refer to 'the Baker family?'"

One student's opinion concerned the several issues of making the transition to college:

It [PASSPORT] made you feel like you got in here and talked to somebody. You found out they were all just people here. It made me feel like it wasn't such a giant step that I was taking after all. That it was just a normal process in life It's an attainable thing. I liked it; I thought it was fun. I had to schedule it into my time. I had to arrange my work and my baby-sitters and things like that. It was something that I wanted to do because I wanted to have that key, that preparation. I didn't want to come in here on the first day of classes and be looking for my classes. I think the big thing was that I felt comfortable in the college itself, and that everyone here is available to help you. (PP)

This student's comments are indicative of the high degree of satisfaction many **adult** students felt with PASSPORT because of her mention of taking time off work and **hiring** a babysitter. The program was valuable enough to her that she felt that investment **was** worth it. The warmth and familiarity many students found in the PASSPORT **program** helped them to feel a connectedness to the College. Another student summarized **the importance** of making a connection from the start when she said,

I liked meeting the teachers. That's where I met my Anatomy and Physiology teacher when we signed up for classes. That was nice. I liked being in that room, I liked having the teachers there. They introduced themselves. That was really rare that you get the teachers from all the different (disciplines). I met (a dean). It was like, wow! She's in here!

My Anatomy and Physiology teacher is in here. I thought that was a very good introduction. (PP)

Not only did students enjoy meeting the teachers, they also reported their satisfaction at meeting other students. As one student said in explaining how the program helped with her apprehension,

Meeting other students. Everybody telling others what their majors are. Some of them were similar to mine. I really liked that. It was nice being able to come in the first day and recognize some people. That was really nice, and to this day, I still recognize some of the people that were in the PASSPORT group. And like I said, today, out of the blue, this woman says, "I remember you. You were in my group." So it is kinda nice. (PP)

Some students I interviewed felt PASSPORT had given them a sense of **connectedness** by informing them of services they might not otherwise have known **about**. For example, one student said,

. . . talking about the learning center; that I used. I didn't know about it. We went down and visited it. That helped a lot. I've been down there a couple of times since then. So that really helped out. I probably wouldn't have thought twice about going to the learning center if they hadn't taken us unless I was really down in a rut. (PP)

Perception of Freshman Orientation and Registration

I felt it was important to gain a sense of the students' perception of their initial **entry** program, so I asked them to tell me what their freshman orientation session was **like**. When I asked them to describe freshman orientation and registration, the majority

(13 of the 26, including one dropout) of the students remembered taking tests. Two remembered having met teachers in their programs, and one remembered meeting the dean. One student reported her fear of being required to remember all of the information presented, which she found overwhelming. Two students specifically remembered watching a video presentation about college life. Finally, five students described orientation as the time they had signed up for their first-quarter classes.

Another student was less than enthusiastic when she said, “It was really boring. It **was** really long, but you know, they were really helpful in helping you decide how many **classes** to take.” Yet another student seemed to have mixed feelings about freshman **orientation** and registration:

Oh, it was kind of boring, actually. We had to take all those tests. It was beneficial to do actually because you got to find out where you placed and all those different things. You got to meet some of the different instructors . . . and they helped you pick out your classes . . . (nPP)

When the nonPASSPORT students were asked to describe the benefits of the **freshman** orientation and registration program they had attended, two said there were **none**. Two students had enjoyed learning more about Baker College programs; one **realized** college was going to be a lot of hard work; and one felt the program helped her **come** out of her shell. One student who felt freshman orientation and registration was **very** beneficial said,

I realized I had to work really harder to get what I want, and that’s what they were saying. You gotta work hard to succeed in life, in order to succeed, period. And it’s true. (nPP)

The number of comments concerning the students' perceptions of the benefits of freshman orientation and registration is somewhat small because of the existence of another program. Six students, for various reasons, did not attend a session of freshman orientation and registration as required of all new students, primarily because they made their decision to register just as the quarter was beginning, when all of the scheduled sessions had taken place. Rather, they were oriented and registered by an admissions representative in a one-on-one format. One of these students said,

I came here and I talked to somebody in admissions and she got me signed up right then. The quarter was starting. I told her what I wanted to do and so she took me right over to the [academic] office and we got that stuff going and I signed up for the class right then, registered and I stood in line to get my book for the class, and that was pretty much it and I was ready to go; so that was really neat the way that worked out. (nPP)

One student who enjoyed coming in alone said,

Well, I didn't come with a group. I came by myself to take a tour of the building. I just registered and everything at the registrar's office and then the lady that did my registration took me and showed me where each individual class would be. (nPP)

While the first student's view seems positive, the second one presented here seems ambivalent. As I will discuss elsewhere, the feelings of the students in the "other" group seem much more diverse than those of the students in either the PASSPORT or nonPASSPORT groups. This is a method of orientation and registration I will examine

more closely elsewhere, along with its implications, as it has the potential for damaging the College's customer-service reputation.

Reasons for Returning to Baker College

As part of answering the question of retention, I asked students for their reasons for returning to Baker during the interviews. Upon being asked, "Why did you return to Baker College for a second quarter?" many students were initially stumped for an answer **and** needed time to mull the question before answering. Nine of these students acted as if **it** were simply the next logical step and gave an answer that seemed consistent with their **nonverbal** behavior. Seven students said they had returned because they had enjoyed **their** first quarter experience, and two students indicated they had returned because they **appreciated** the speed with which a ten-week quarter had gone by. Only two students **gave** negative reasons for returning; i.e., fear of losing the credits in a transfer to another **college**. One student said she was not a quitter; two students returned "to earn more **credits**;" and one student responded to the question by saying "may as well [continue]."

Next Logical Step

Taping the interviews allowed me to attend to the subjects' body language more **than I** would have been able to had I simply hand recorded responses. I was amused by **the facial** expressions of most subjects when I asked them why they had returned to **Baker** for a second quarter. Most of the students' faces registered confusion or chagrin, **and** many of them laughed as they gave their answer, almost as if they were indulging a **slow-witted** child. One student said, "So I can finish my program. [laughs] It's the next **step** for me." (PP) Most students also indicated a determination or intrinsic motivation **to** complete the degree. As one student said, "Because I'm going to graduate; regardless

of what it takes, I'm going to graduate.” (nPP) Another student said, “I don't think there was ever any doubt. I like their system and I like the teachers.” (PP) A third student simply said, “I really liked it and I felt really confident. . . .” (PP) Another student summarized the attitude most students expressed:

To get my degree. I've always liked school anyway. It's just always been a good thing for me. To better educate myself. It was just the next step.

You know, I'll come back (every) quarter until I get my degree. (PP)

Fear of Credits not Transferring

Two students expressed a concern about credits not transferring to another college **and** stated they were continuing at Baker College because they didn't want to lose the **time** they had already invested. In addition to students who claimed to return to Baker **due** to this concern, there were also two students who had non-transferable scholarships.

One student whose reasons for choosing to attend Baker were, “It was close, and I **like** the idea of the 10-week classes,” mentioned a regret for having chosen Baker, based **on this** misperception held by many students:

The only thing that they don't tell you when you do this, when you do sign up at Baker, is that a lot of your credits won't transfer to other colleges. I was really unaware of that. Like . . . I'm pretty sure none of my credits will transfer to [a major university]. (nPP)

Another student who seemed also to hold this misperception said she returned to Baker “**b**ecause once you come, your credits may transfer or they may not.” (nPP) In my **e**xperience, this is a misperception perpetuated by recruiters from other colleges and is **f**requently mentioned during advising sessions. Because Baker College is fully

accredited and has articulation agreements with many Michigan colleges and universities, students transferring from Baker Colleges to other institutions have reported their coursework and in some cases, entire associate degrees transferred to their new institution, depending on the new degree.

Enjoyment of Program, Classes, or the College

Many students are acutely aware of what is offered at other colleges in Flint and **openly** expressed their opinions concerning Baker College and its competitors:

I enjoy it over here at Baker. . . . I just like it at Baker better. Over at [the community college] they don't have the medical assistant program I want; they have medical transcription. I don't want that. It's less classes here to take for what I want than what it is at [the community college]. I just take 26 courses here to get my Associate's for just the medical assistant. At [the community college] I'd have to take medical transcription with it and probably have to take about fifty classes. . . . For \$600 for four classes, all four classes better have something pertaining to my degree." (PP)

Another student who felt very positive about the College said,

I like it. I like it a lot here. It's laid back; a lot of the teachers are really laid back and easy going, and classes are small. That's part of the reason why I didn't want a big college. Because I need more. . . not like individual but smaller. . . where you can know everybody and a teacher knows you. I think that's a really big, big thing. (PP)

Yet another student who seemed to have positive feeling about the College said she **returned**

... because I enjoy it. To me, I want to succeed in life. I don't want to be down and out and having to depend on welfare and stuff like that, because that's no future for me. And I think Baker is a nice school, and I learned from it. I can't discriminate against that. If I'm learning something, I'm gonna keep going. I like it a lot. It's a nice school and it's helpful. (PP)

Another student said, "Well, I enjoyed the first class I took. I'm only taking one class at a time. ... But I enjoyed the experience, very much." (nPP)

One adult student sardonically said he returned to Baker College because "I **figured** the ball and chain is already rolling so I may as well stick with it. Because if I **keep** be-bopping around with it (transferring to other colleges), it's not gonna work." (nPP) Another student, one who seemed to be struggling, just laughed at the question and **said**, "I'll probably be here for the next four or five years. I just want to finish out **school**." (nPP)

Enjoyment of the classes taken during the first quarter at Baker was reported by **also** by two students who had initially begun attending Baker due to scholarships they **had** received solely for that purpose. They reported their satisfaction with the experience **was** strong enough that they intended to continue attending. While one subject reported it **was** her personality that made her feel confident enough to continue her education, the **other** subject indicated the source of her confidence was the PASSPORT program and the **college's** policy of allowing students to repeat courses as many times as necessary to **pass**.

Belongingness

One category I examined, as reported in my thesaurus, was that of belongingness.

As the literature review shows, belongingness is one area that is a strong predictor of retention. Students who feel they belong are more likely to stay in college. I discuss this concept in some detail below, in the third research question discussion, as well as here. One poignant comment about belongingness came from a student whose fear was that **graduating** high school in the top ten of her class was not good enough to ensure success **in** college. She said,

I think college is the greatest experience anyone could ever *endure* (student's emphasis). It's a lot of work, especially at Baker [because] it's fast paced. And I want to be successful and I have friends around me and staff here at Baker who want to help and I feel that, if I can get help and feel loved and everything here at Baker, then why not come back? (PP)

Because the College prides itself on both "customer service" and what is referred to by **insiders** as the "Baker family," this remark, more than any other made during the course of **the** interviews, showed this student was truly where she belonged. One student, who **had** enrolled after a one-on-one session with an admission counselor, made a pragmatic **comment** about why she was still at Baker that clearly illustrated how she felt she fit in: "I'm a student. It's a business relationship. I pay for the education and hope to get what I'm paying for." (nPP) I felt this remark showed an acute sense of congruence with the College's goals and was illustrative of her sense of belonging, as the student's goals were congruent with the College's goals.

Long-term Investment (Career)

There were many students I interviewed who had their eyes on a long-term goal.

One student said, “I came back to just basically further my education and try to get with the program. . . . to work toward my goal of (eventually) getting my masters.” (PP) As another student put it, “Because that’s why I came here, because I understood then that education was going to be the only key to a better future. And I really like it here.” (PP) One of the home-schooled minor students gave his reason for returning as simply, “I needed the Spanish credits. If I hadn’t kept going into Spanish II, I would have lost the other half credit of Spanish.” (nPP)

Data Concerning Satisfaction with Initial College Experience

The second research question for this study was: Will the students who attend **PASSPORT** report a higher rate of satisfaction with their initial college experience than **those** students who attend only the traditional freshman orientation? The interview data **indicate** that they do. The exemplars presented in this chapter are a fair representation of **these** data, and they overwhelmingly indicate the PASSPORT students are more satisfied **with** their experience, plan to continue their studies and persist to graduation, and would **recommend** the experience to prospective new students. All twelve of the students I **interviewed** who had attended PASSPORT described helpful features of the program. **While** many nonPASSPORT students also seemed satisfied, their comments were not as **enthusiastic** or as copious. Of the twelve nonPASSPORT students I interviewed, none **used** positive language to describe any features of freshman orientation and registration. **Eleven** of these students gave a neutral description and one gave a negative description (“boring”). Compared with the glowing comments made by the PASSPORT participants,

it would appear the PASSPORT students were more satisfied with their initial college experience, as discussed later.

Also included in the interview data are students' various reasons for attending Baker College; information about their apprehension toward attending college; and the students' reasons for choosing to attend PASSPORT and their views of the program. I also will discuss students' integration into college life and their degree of comfort in making contacts. Finally, I will discuss the students' success—why they returned to Baker, the source of their confidence, and the groups' pooled statistics.

I was first interested in the students' reasons for choosing Baker College and their satisfaction with their integration into the College community. There seemed to be little difference in the students' level of satisfaction with their orientation program, regardless of whether they were in the PASSPORT group or the nonPASSPORT sample. However, when asked to describe the benefits of PASSPORT, all twelve participants were able to list one or more positive features that were helpful to them. Of the nonPASSPORT students, only eight listed positive features of freshman orientation and registration, and four said there were none. None of the nonPASSPORT students gave any indication of being aware of the existence of the PASSPORT program, yet many of their remarks concerning the nature of the freshman orientation and registration session they attended were remarkably similar to those of the PASSPORT students, as I will discuss below. In addition, ten of the nonPASSPORT students would recommend other prospective students go through the same procedures they had, one would not, and one was unsure; while all twelve of the PASSPORT students would recommend PASSPORT to prospective students. All of the students who went through only freshman orientation

and registration would recommend it to a friend or family member thinking of attending Baker College. As one student said, “. . . they should go and really listen. . . . And take those placement tests and see where they stand so they know which class they should take.” Another student said,

I would tell them it’s just basically tests, find out more about what you’re doing, get to meet the dean of that program and pick out your classes.

They should go. (nPP)

Of the control group (nonPASSPORT) students, six reported they did not attend a **freshman** orientation and registration session. Rather, they had enrolled at Baker College **by** going through the admissions department. This option included a personal tour and **one-on-one** attention by an Admissions representative but did not include many other **important** features of freshman orientation and registration, such as testing. This is an **option** of which I was unaware, despite teaching at Baker for over 17 years, until I began **conducting** interviews for this study. Four of the six students who registered through the **admissions** department would recommend the procedure to friends or family members **who** were thinking of attending Baker; they liked the one-on-one process and felt that it **met** their needs. However, one student who enrolled for classes without attending **freshman** orientation and registration, that is, who enrolled through the admissions **department**, said he would not recommend the procedure; and one student who went **through** the admissions department was unsure whether she would recommend it to **friends** and family members who were thinking of attending Baker College.

Improving / Recommending PASSPORT and Freshman Orientation Programs

I asked the interview subjects what they would tell others who might be thinking of attending Baker College; I was hoping to hear whether they would recommend attending freshman orientation and registration and/or PASSPORT. Of the 26 students in this study, only two students were unsure whether they would recommend the type of freshman orientation they had undergone. Both of these students were in the control group, having gone through a one-on-one registration with a representative from the admissions department. All of the other students, both PASSPORT and nonPASSPORT indicated they would recommend their program to someone considering attending Baker College. This could be considered a sign of the students' satisfaction, since a student who was dissatisfied would be unlikely to recommend the experience.

Likelihood of Recommending PASSPORT to a Prospective Student

One student's statement concerning whether she would recommend PASSPORT to a friend echoed the importance of integration into the College community:

I would tell them to go. I would tell them that I went through it and I feel a lot better about it I think everybody should go through it, actually. I think it would be helpful if it was required for all new students. (PP)

Several students expressed the value of what they learned in PASSPORT in terms of sacrifice:

I would tell them absolutely, go, don't miss it. I would tell them it's worth taking a day off work to go. To me it was an invaluable tool. It gives you a head start. (PP)

In addition, several students mentioned the usefulness of the time management and study techniques presented in PASSPORT. As one student said, "I would recommend it, especially if they'd been out of school for a long time." (PP) Another student was less specific but more enthusiastic:

I would tell them that it is very useful if you are apprehensive or anything about going to college. It's the wisest choice that you could ever make. I can say, just for myself, that I was the scariest person in the whole wide world and for me to overcome that and enjoy college. . . . It's great; PASSPORT is great. (PP)

Improvement of the Programs

Most of the students (19) who had attended either freshman orientation alone or **both** programs indicated they had no suggestions for improvement. Two students (one **from** each group) suggested including in the PASSPORT program material on how to **cope** with the pace of a ten-week quarter. Two students expressed an interest in learning **more** about what services the college has to offer to entering freshman. In addition, two **students** indicated an interest in more detailed coverage, perhaps extending to additional **sessions**, although neither student attended additional sessions that were offered and **widely** advertised. (Total attendance for the six follow-up sessions was only 12 **students**.) Finally, one PASSPORT student felt more group activities would have been **beneficial**, and one control group subject expressed a desire to learn more about time **management**. In all, only two PASSPORT interview subjects made suggestions to **improve** the program, while four nonPASSPORT students made suggestions to improve **freshman** orientation and registration. It is possible that the lack of ideas for

improvement indicate a higher degree of satisfaction than that experienced by the control group.

One very practical suggestion made by a student for improving PASSPORT was the inclusion of testimonials. “. . . bring some of the graduates down and let them tell the students about their first term and their last few terms and how to study for tests too.”

(PP) Another student’s suggestion was

Go more in depth with what you can ask in the Academic Office, what you can get Have representatives from certain offices give specific examples It would help knowing what each office could do. (PP)

Another student’s suggestions were to include more group activities in **P**ASSPORT and to break it up into two sessions, while one other student commented,

You know what I think is missing from PASSPORT? The emphasis on the ten weeks, not fifteen. There may be some students that aren’t ready for that. It’s a shock It’s a huge shock to be jamming this material in. . . . For the students who need to know, they need to know stuff like the equation of, for every hour you’re in class you’re doing something outside of class. The reality is on the weekend you don’t have much time for “pie-charting,” free time, forget about it! (PP)

Only two suggestions were made for improving freshman orientation and **r**egistration. One student saw a need to include some information on time management. **S**he said, “It might have helped [if time management had been included] because I found out [what it was like], I guess you have to go through it to find out what it was like.”

(nPP) Two other students, the first from the one-on-one subgroup, felt the need for more information on available customer services. One of them said,

I didn't [go to an orientation]. I went through admissions. It was pretty vague. I didn't get a catalog, or "this is the facilities," what you had, really anything. I was not told that you didn't get a student ID, or that you need a parking permit. (laughs) I don't know if I was aware that there was an orientation or not. I don't remember knowing that there was one and chose not to go. . . . (S)omebody knew I was a new student and they could have at least In fact, I think I asked for a catalog, something, you have a right to see something, and I forgot what they gave me. I think it was a map, a floor plan of the campus. But that was it. I don't know where the rec. room is; I still don't know if you have a rec. room. I just haven't pursued it. (nPP)

Perhaps Baker College should develop a better system for orienting students who sign up **a**fter traditional freshman orientation and registration sessions have ended. A college that **p**rides itself on customer service should not allow a situation that breeds this negativity. **T**he other student who saw a need for more information said,

They need to tell you more about the stuff they have for you, like free tutoring. They do say that, to an extent, but a lot of people don't hear it. . . . Just letting people know that service is available. And the laboratories, and the library, pretty much, you can do that all the time, as long as it's available. A lot of people don't know that computers are available for you. (nPP)

Levels of Student Integration and One-on-One Contacts

The majority of the students (25 of the 26 total interviewed) had at least three **contacts** with Baker College employees during the first quarter. The number of contacts **ranged** from a low of three to a high of 40. One student indicated she had contact with a **Baker** College employee at least once per day, citing a learning disability as her reason **for seeking** out faculty members on a daily basis. Five students simply indicated they had **“many”** contacts with Baker College employees during their first quarter in college. Only **two** students indicated that any Baker College employee had ever made them feel **uncomfortable**. Eleven students stated that they felt very comfortable in their contacts **with Baker** College employees, and the other fifteen subjects all reported, for the most **part, that** they felt comfortable making contact with a Baker College employee.

Contacts with College Services

In keeping with the importance of interactions (Tinto, 1993), I asked the interview **subjects** how many times they had contact with College employees. While students **usually** mentioned several offices visited in their first quarter, often they were able to **specifically** describe one that stood out in their minds. For example, one student **mentioned** the importance of the Financial Aid department’s helpfulness to her:

I had to get something figured out because I actually got more money than I thought I was gonna get. So actually this quarter I got a third class where last quarter I only got two classes. More money came in so I get a third class and I was confused why I got it. . . . So I was there a couple times trying to get unconfused. (PP)

Problems with the office of Financial Aid were mentioned more than those with any other office. Another student openly discussed with me a negative situation he encountered:

. . . numerous times because this semester and last semester, they screwed up my financial aid and said I couldn't take my final exams, and it was their mistake. So I've been in and out lots of times. (nPP)

When asked which encounters stood out in his mind the most, he said, "The financial aid department; they don't have their stuff together because I'm not the only student who's **had** problems with them not getting their paperwork right." Ironically, after asserting **these** feelings, when he was asked if he felt comfortable making contact with these **employees**, his response was, "Oh, yeah. I actually do see (name of one of the financial aid officers) socially, once in a while. They're all nice."

Another student mentioned feeling nervous and overwhelmed at Baker Advising Days, a week-long advising and registration session, where representatives from the Academic Office, Business Office, Financial Aid Office, Counselor's Office and the Faculty Office are present to help students register early for the next quarter's classes. **Although** lines are usually short, the sights and sounds of the crowded office may seem **overwhelming**. As the student said,

I was kind of nervous about signing up for this quarter's classes. I really didn't know what I was doing. I felt like I could have used a little more help. . . . Registration (during Baker Advising Days) was helpful but it seemed like everyone else knew what to do. I felt like the other students already knew. I didn't really know the procedures and how to decide what classes to take. Also, does it matter if I take this first or that first; and how

do I make that decision? I didn't really know a lot about that and I probably still don't, so the next time, I'll probably ask more questions.

(PP)

Another student reported an uncomfortable contact with an employee:

I went to one of the other offices downstairs and I did want some information. I wasn't sure which classes I should go for in the Life and Learning (class). They had a generic step program that they gave me, but I wasn't signed up for a specific program at that time. So I ended up talking to someone on the 'phone who got me a step plan and mailed it to my home. But when I went there in person to talk to somebody about where I was going and what the heck I was doing, it was a guy, I don't remember his name. It was not where I had to get an appointment ahead of time. You get to go to the office there. That was no help. I did not feel comfortable with that person. He made me feel like an idiot. I was in there, and he was like, what do you want? And I was like, well, I don't really know. I was kind of hoping for some help. And I had a question about some of my essential credits transferring and I didn't know who I should talk to about what direction to go in, so I was really frustrated by that person. (nPP)

Several students mentioned they spent large amounts of time in the Library or Learning Center, especially in the Math Lab or the Computer Lab. This is not an unexpected finding due to the large percentage of students who start their academic career at Baker College in one or more developmental courses, including Basic

Mathematics, a modularized class which requires intensive support from math tutors and computer software. One student, in reviewing the contacts she had made during the Fall 1997 quarter with Baker College employees, said,

Let's see, I went to the Financial Aid office about three times; Academic Office, about five times; I think I went to my instructors after class seven or eight times. I *stayed* (student's emphasis) in the Learning Center; that's where I'm on my way to when I leave here. (PP)

Another student outlined her itinerary of consultations during her first quarter at Baker:

[I interacted with Baker employees] a lot because I was here to see [one of my teachers] everyday. Everyday at eight o'clock. Learning Center, (name of a person), she is the tutor in my field, and there's a gal named (name of a person) in the big computer room, and she helped me with one of my classes. A lot of time talking to (a financial aid officer). He's the one that I like who answers all my financial aid questions. Him and (someone) in the Academic Office. I'm teaching her about learning disabilities [laughs]. She's learning. (Name of a person) in housing. I used to live in the dorms. (PP)

One student, when asked how many times she had interacted with Baker College **employees** during her first quarter, said,

Quite a few times. I can't give you a set number; more than tenSome were good and some were bad. Some had attitude problems, like whoa! But like the admissions people; they were nice. Certain places that you go to, like the academic office or the learning center, they kind of had little

attitude problems. Admissions made me feel comfortable, yes. Financial aid too, that was fine. They helped, like when I didn't have enough money for books with my rent. Somehow they fixed it and I was fine. I got what I needed. (nPP)

One student's contacts, as he put it, had been pretty limited just to the bookstore, admissions, and the business office. . . . In general the bookstore seemed a little disorganized [The business office] has actually been the smoothest part, the paying. (laughs) They take the money real easy. (nPP)

The situation reported by another student made it clear the student felt she had made **academic** progress in her first quarter:

I talked with financial aid regularly about my room and stuff I went to a writing tutor every week, maybe twice a week for my comp class. [Those contacts were favorable] because my first paper I had for my Comp. I class I had like a fifty [percent] on it. After I went to the learning center and figured out more what they were asking, I got an eighty [I felt comfortable during those contacts] after I got there. I was nervous before; I was so stressed out going in there; I was so nervous. (nPP)

The services available in the learning center, especially the computer lab with all of its **tutors**, seemed to be greatly appreciated by all students I interviewed. Again, this can be **seen** as a predictor of persistence, as knowledge of available services often leads to **greater** satisfaction and persistence (Levitz and Noel, 1997). As one student stated,

I needed to use the computer room because I don't have a computer at home. I was able to go right in and get a computer and do my work. I only had a couple of hours that I had to put into my schedule. I was able to come right in, do it right away. (PP)

Degree of Comfort with Contacts

All of the students I interviewed, both PASSPORT and nonPASSPORT, reported an overall feeling of comfort making contact with Baker College employees. There seemed to be no difference in their level of comfort, although the PASSPORT students reported a feeling that the program may have influenced their feeling of willingness to seek out such contacts. The nonPASSPORT students disagreed that freshman orientation helped them feel more comfortable making contacts. The student who had spent so much time in Financial Aid stated she felt "really comfortable" contacting employees but that

Financial Aid was a little bit tough. And it felt like I was getting a little shuffled around. And I didn't have quite as good a feeling that they wanted to help me out so easily like the other people did. (nPP)

Another comment shared by a student concerned the Learning Support Center, not unexpected for as much time as students spend there. Occasionally, a student is caught unaware of a crucial policy, as was the student who shared this story:

Only thing that scared the crap out of me, and I called her on it, was (name of a person). I'm making an appointment, and she said, out of the blue, "Do you know that if you miss five appointments you're no longer able to be in the Learning Center?" And I literally felt like I was gonna cry. Because I thought, if I can't come in this Learning Center, I'm in a bad

way. So I saw her in her office and I said, "You know, you really scared the hell out of me." And she goes, "I'm sorry." And I said, "You should have put that in a letter somewhere. I had no idea there was a 'Clinton three-strikes-you're-out' policy." I *had* missed appointments. (nPP)

However, most students commended the employees of the Learning Center, especially **those** in the Computer Lab. As one student said,

Would the computer center be considered [in counting the number of contacts with employees]? Well then, maybe nine or ten (laughs)! [They made me feel] very comfortable. In the computer lab, you can raise your hand, and there's always someone there to help you. And they're more than willing to help. They stand there, and they don't walk away. When they think you're done, and you say, "It's okay; I think I understand now," then they leave. (PP)

Many students also have reported an easy camaraderie among students using the **computer** lab in the Learning Support Center. One student gave an illustration of the **connectedness** she experienced:

... it's not just the one-on-one thing. It's people my age. People are joking around. We were joking around last night and I left my disk there but when I called up there, twice they said it wasn't there. I said, "Okay." I come up here this morning and I found it right where I left it. I said, "You guys!" (PP)

Another student, in discussing her employee contacts, stated,

I never had to come up here [to the faculty office. I went to other offices] probably about five times, mostly going to the library They were real friendly and very helpful. They didn't have an attitude; they acted like they were real pleased to help you. I felt very comfortable because I didn't know about the library. (nPP)

Involvement in Extracurricular Activities

Surprisingly, and in contrast with Tinto's (1975, 1993) theory about the **importance** of school involvement, the majority of the students interviewed for this study **were** not involved in extracurricular activities at the College. Twenty-two students I **interviewed** were not involved in any College-sponsored extracurricular activities, **including** the twelve PASSPORT interview subjects. However, they appeared to feel **they** were well integrated into the College community in their remarks reported above. It is **possible** that this is a difference unique to non-traditional students at Baker because the **average** age is 28 years. Older, adult students may feel they belong because it is evident **that their** peers are their own age. It is also possible that these students felt connected and **involved** due simply to their contacts in the classroom. This is a likely explanation in this **case** due to the heavy emphasis at Baker College on using a variety of teaching **techniques** to appeal to all learning styles. Three students living in College housing are **involved** in residence life activities as members of the Dorm Council; and one student is **an active** member of the Interior Design Society, one of the most active student chapters **of a** professional organization in existence at the College. Many of the students offered **unsolicited** explanations, usually having to do with work or family responsibilities, for

their lack of involvement. Two students indicated they were interested in joining a student club and expressed their intention to initiate membership in the next year.

The three students who reported being involved in the Dorm Council, the residence life student organization, were from the control group, as was the one student who reported involvement in the Interior Design Society. Although it may appear at first glance that the control group students were more involved in extracurricular activities than are PASSPORT students, there are too few students in this study to be able to say this with any certainty. In addition, it is possible that the dorm students did not feel they needed PASSPORT because they were living in residential housing and were in close contact already with other students.

Reasons for Confidence

The majority of the students in this study indicated a strong desire to complete a degree, to find a job that would lead to a specific career, or to increase earnings. Several students from both the experimental (PASSPORT) and the control groups indicated the reason for their confidence that they could perform college level work stemmed from their personality. In addition, several students stated, "I'm not a quitter." Four students indicated the reason for their confidence was the knowledge that help was always available. While only two students indicated PASSPORT was the reason for their confidence, there were also two students who specified the Learning Support Center and/or its personnel. Family support was the reason given by two students for their confidence. Finally, two students simply stated their desire to finish their degree as the reason for their confidence in completing college level work.

Personality as a Source of Confidence

One student's personality came out strongly in the first interview I conducted when she said,

I don't know. I'm not gonna give up. No matter what I have to do. Even if I do get a bad grade, it's not like I'm gonna quit. It's my personality. It took me a really long time to get here, and I'm not gonna give up. (PP)

An online student who found college to be more difficult than anticipated echoed this comment:

Because I'm not a quitter. If I start something, I'm going to finish it. It's not the end of the world Only seven people actually finished the class on schedule. They were very determined, focused people, trying to improve themselves professionally. (nPP)

Another student said,

Oh, that's just the type of person I am. I don't give up just because the wind shifts or whatever. I like challenges. They're very stressful when I'm going through them, but that's just the type of person I am. I accept challenges and I work my way through them. (PP)

In **apparent** agreement with Knowles' (1980) research, one student cited family responsibilities as the reason for her persistence, as well as her personality when she said,

I'm gonna make it all the way to the degree. Yes, ma'am! I'm sticking to it, like peanut butter and jelly. Why? One, I like it; two, I'm praying on it; three, there's no doubt—I'm not leaving. There's no doubt in my head, I'm gonna finish this My son is counting on me. (PP)

One student attributed his success less to the College's programs than to himself. He said,

This might sound immodest, but I believe in myself. See, I'm a strong person, so I can pretty much accomplish anything. I have a learning disability, as far as concentrating, being able to focus. I have twenty-minute periods when I'm gone. Other than that, I'm pretty much confident in everything, even when I'm having problems or something like that. It's part of my personality to stick to it. Like, I'm a hiker and mountaineer and it's like climbing a mountain. Once you look at the top, you're like, oh my God! Am I ever going to get up there? But eventually you do. No matter how you get up there, as long as you get up there, you're fine. You don't have to be an excellent climber or hiker to make it up there, as long as you make it up there. One step at a time. (nPP)

Learning Support Center

One student who had been very candid about her struggle to overcome a learning disability cited the learning center as a key factor that gave her the confidence to stay in school. She said she had visited "(name of a person) in the learning center. She said, 'My sister has learning disabilities. I'm here to tell you, you can do it. You're smart.' You know, her encouragement." (PP) Another student, although she had not attended PASSPORT or freshman orientation and registration, attributed her success to the availability of help: "Well, I was able to go to the learning center and catch up." (nPP) Yet another student mentioned being able to get help, although she did not specifically mention the learning center. She said,

Just knowing that I had people I could go to if I didn't understand it but most of the time I did understand it. If I didn't understand it there was always someone there I could talk to. I wasn't left alone to try to figure it out. (PP)

Other Factors

All of the students I interviewed, the adults as well as traditional age students, **seemed** to have a very clear understanding of why they were in college. Not all of these **students** attributed their confidence to the elements discussed above; many identified **other** factors, such as their age. One single mother described this feeling when she said,

I don't know. Must be my age, I guess. (I) felt like, I'm paying for college now. I felt like I had to succeed at it, continue on. When I was eighteen, I just wanted to get away from home. It didn't mean as much as it does now. (PP)

One student seemed to be indicating a variety of factors when she summarized the source of **her** confidence thus:

Basically, I understood all the work. And I got along with all my teachers. The work wasn't easy, but it wasn't hard. I was just confident in passing, and I had help from family and friends. PASSPORT did help me with my confidence. (PP)

Another student who specifically credited the PASSPORT program as the factor **responsible** for her confidence said,

The first five weeks of class [laughs] in my math class I got real discouraged and I said that I wasn't coming back here any more. But then

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I said, I'll stick it out, and the PASSPORT teacher had said, don't expect to pass every class the first time. That's what pulled me through, just knowing that I had enough time to repeat the class how ever many times I need to. (PP)

Another student who credited a combination of factors for her confidence said,

I figured this is the first week of class. This is just simple so far. Then as the weeks progressed, the second, third, fourth week, I said, hey! I can do this! The teachers care about me, they can talk to me one-on-one, and they can tell me how to do these things and that's why I love this: small class sizes and teachers that want to help you. So they can help me get through all these nervous problems that I had. That would be great! (PP)

Interestingly, the student who knew he was not going to pass one class did not drop out **a**lthough he did not cite any source of confidence. He said,

I did finish the math class. I figured I might as well get as much out of it as I could even if I'm not gonna pass. Just finish the class. It's too late to drop anyway. (nPP)

Yet another student's source of confidence was "knowing that I have to make it. I don't **h**ave a choice. I have to. This is something that I chose to do." (nPP)

The student who felt very positive about the College also felt there was never a **p**oint when she thought she wouldn't make it:

Not really. I knew I was always doing my homework, right after I got it.

And I ended up getting pretty good grades, so I knew if I kept going,

going, going that I would make it. I didn't really think I was gonna fail or do bad or anything. (nPP)

The source of her confidence was

Just doing the work, and listening to the lectures. Because some days I would listen and think, oh my God! I don't know this, but if you really listened to lectures and take good notes, it's really helpful.

The struggling student felt she wasn't going to make it during "fifth or sixth week last quarter. I had so many things going, I didn't know how to handle it, and my grades all went down." I asked her what she did and what made her so confident. Her response was

"After I got my bad grades, it really . . . I wasn't happy with it, and I even took a class over again because I wasn't happy with my grades." She felt confident because, as she put it, "I want to finish, and see it through." (PP)

One student's response to the question about what made her so confident was

I guess it's personal because I believe in myself. And if I believe in myself, and I think I need help and I don't understand it, and there's somebody there to help me, that makes me more confident in myself. But if I get a teacher that won't help me, that's when I be like, no, I can't do this. I would go to someone else that would help me. I guess that's how I get more confident, is because of me knowing that I can do it. (nPP)

One student summarized the view of many pragmatic adult students to whom college means so much when she said,

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I don't know. Partly because the help is there if I ask for it. Because I know what's out there if I don't go to school. The same job I had before, making six or eight dollars an hour for the next fifty years. And you might as well plan on working until you drop dead in the office, then they'll sweep you aside and put somebody else in your place Because I had the motivation to do it. Because I want to do a career that I love and that I enjoy and make good money at it. My goal in life is not to make big money but to be able to take care of my family. You have to work. I want to be able to do something that I love. I don't want to be doing something that I hate and every morning when I get up I've got a headache because I have to go to work. The only way I'm going to be able to do that is by getting the training, getting the education, and taking the step up. So right now, I have to sacrifice. I'm working in fast food. To me that is a sacrifice. This is a short period in my life, and I'll get through it. When we come out on the other side, it's going to be great! (PP)

Dropouts

In the course of my interviews, I also asked the two students who did not return to **Baker** College if there was anything they could identify that the College could have done **better** or differently to encourage their persistence. One student said, "No, I had so much **help**. . . . The teachers were great; the people in the math lab were great. They were very **patient** with me It was me, not them." (PP) This student also seemed to have a high **regard** for the quality of her contacts with Baker College employees, attributing her **attrition** to herself. Her reason for not returning was having failed one (mandatory) test in

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Basic Mathematics several times and realizing that she could not go on to take other classes to eventually become a bookkeeper without the ability to understand fractions and percentages. The other student who dropped out cited strong negative treatment from her husband concerning her absence from the home and its effect on the family.

Midterm Deficiency (Exception) Reports

The third research question for this study was: Will those students who attend **PASSPORT** be reported to the Academic Office for academic deficiencies at midterm at **a lower rate** during their first quarter in college than those students who attend only **traditional** freshman orientation? An analysis of the fifth week Exception Reports shows **the PASSPORT** students were actually reported to the Academic Office at a higher rate **than** nonPASSPORT students for academic deficiencies at Midterm. Of the 78 **PASSPORT** students, 23 were listed in Exception Reports. Only 12 nonPASSPORT **students** from the random sample ($n=78$) were reported. This is a finding inconsistent **with** my hypothesis. Because this finding was not uncovered until after the interviews **were** conducted, I was unable to question the interview subjects. I can only speculate as to **the** cause of the anomaly: perhaps the PASSPORT participants were enrolled in more **difficult** courses than nonPASSPORT students. By the end of the quarter, however, there is **a** converse difference between the two groups that was greater than expected. Twenty **of those** 23 PASSPORT students who were in academic deficiency at midterm were able to **bring** their grades up to at least a passing average while two were academically **dismissed** for failing all subjects, and one withdrew from all classes. (See Table 4) By **the** start of the Winter 1998 quarter, four PASSPORT students had been academically **dismissed** for a failing grade average, six had been placed on academic probation for

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achieving less than a C- average, and none had been expelled. Of the 12 nonPASSPORT students from the sample group who were academically deficient at midterm, only three were able to bring their grades up to a passing average, six were academically dismissed for failing all subjects, two withdrew from all classes, and one had been expelled. By the start of the Winter 1998 quarter, of the entire PASSPORT non-attendees group (n = 98), seventeen had been academically dismissed, thirteen had been placed on academic probation, and one had been expelled.

It is interesting to note that the students were not officially notified by the College that they were in deficiency due to the clerical error in the Academic Office that was mentioned above: Exception Reports were never entered into the computer nor were grades mailed to the students. Thus, while 20 (of 23) PASSPORT students and three (of 12) nonPASSPORT students brought their grades up to a passing level by the end of the quarter, they did so without official notification by the College of their deficiencies. I did not ask the students when I interviewed them if they were included in this group or how they raised their grades, primarily because these data were not collected and analyzed until after the interviews had been completed. It is possible that students were notified by their instructors, who might have volunteered to share with students their midterm grades or who might have answered requests from students for grades, what their grades were. However, it is also possible that students brought up their grades without actually being told that they were academically deficient. It is also possible that the PASSPORT Program may have helped the students know what to do, judging by the higher percentage of PASSPORT program participants (87 percent) who did raise their grade average to passing by the end of the quarter, as compared with the nonPASSPORT

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sample (25 percent). Another support for this theory is the fact that one PASSPORT participant officially withdrew from the College during the Fall quarter, a step many students do not bother to take. This student knew what to do to leave the College officially and still leave himself/herself the option of returning for possible future re-enrollment without the complication of being placed on probation. As of the first week of Spring 1998, this student had been reinstated and was again attending Baker College of Flint, under academic probation.

Table 4: Baker College of Flint Entering Freshman
Listed on Fifth Week Exception Report, Fall 1997, by Group

	PASSPORT Group n = 78	nonPASSPORT Sample n = 78
Number of students listed on Exception Reports	23	12
Number of passing gpa's at end of quarter of students listed on E.R.	20	3
Academically dismissed	4	6
Academic probation	6	N/A
Expelled	0	1
Did not return in Winter for other reasons	3	2

(Source: Primary)

An analysis of the students' grades at the conclusion of the Fall 1997 quarter also shows a distinct difference. The PASSPORT group's mean gpa was 2.695 (on a 4.0 scale) for an average of 9.974 credit hours. The mean gpa for the nonPASSPORT sample group was 2.161 for an average of 7.397 credit hours. The median grade for the PASSPORT students was 3.1; for the nonPASSPORT sample, 2.71. It is interesting to

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note, then, that the PASSPORT students' mean gpa was almost .50 higher than the nonPASSPORT group. This difference was statistically significant at a .05 threshold. Keeping in mind that the two groups were not matched in any way, this difference could be explained by the self-selection factor, since the PASSPORT students volunteered for the treatment (the PASSPORT program). It is possible that the PASSPORT students were better students to begin with, perhaps having higher gpa's from high school. However, because I was concerned about this possibility, I looked up the students' entering high school grade point averages and found there was essentially no difference in the two groups: the PASSPORT group's average gpa was 2.59; the nonPASSPORT sample's group gpa was 2.66. Thus, the nonPASSPORT sample's grade point average is actually slightly higher than that of the PASSPORT group. Thus, I would again speculate

Table 5: Baker College of Flint Entering Freshmen's
Final Grade Point Averages, Fall 1997, by Group

	PASSPORT Group	NonPASSPORT Sample	PASSPORT non-attendees
Mean gpa	2.695	2.161	1.16
Median gpa	3.10	2.71	2.26
Credit hours completed	9.97	7.39	8.36
Standard deviation	1.25	1.58	1.58
Variance	1.55	2.49	2.49
Skewness	-1.06	-.48	-.38
Sum of squares	210.22	168.56	2,640.16

(Source: Primary)

that the significant difference in the two groups' gpa's could be attributed to the PASSPORT program. The students who participated in the program appear to have

learned sufficient academic and coping skills to make them more successful in their first quarter in college.

Therefore, the difference in the two groups' Fall 1997 gpa's could be explained by the PASSPORT program itself.

Summary

The PASSPORT students, then, showed a higher retention rate, reported a higher rate of satisfaction, and recovered from midterm deficiencies at a higher rate than the nonPASSPORT sample. These results are analyzed and conclusions and implications for Baker College, other institutions, and future research are presented in Chapter Five.

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CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSIONS

Review of Research Questions and Literature

Helping students make the transition from high school to college is one of the goals of most freshman orientation programs. The trend of students dropping out of college in their first year, many in their first several weeks of their first year, is evidence that some students are inadequately prepared for this transition. This trend is also indicated at Baker College of Flint by the retention statistics I collected and by the repeated comments in this study that freshmen are apprehensive upon beginning college.

In addition, other research (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993) indicates the importance of contacts between students and faculty. Yet, commuter students, who make up a large percentage of the student population at Baker College, are often at risk due to their habit of staying on campus only as long as necessary to attend classes and labs. They often do not initiate contacts with their professors. Evidence collected during this study substantiates this trend: a large number of students who were interviewed commented that their interview was the first time they had ever had occasion to visit the faculty office. Other students' comments seem to indicate many students are hesitant to initiate such contact, although they had many contacts with other staff members.

The keys to helping students feel they fit in at college are their own perceptions of the congruence of the college's and their own goals as well as their degree of contact with other members of the educational community, among other things. Tinto (1993) points out that insufficient interaction may lead to a reduced commitment to educational goals and to a feeling of isolation from intellectual life. Adult students are especially likely to

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dropout if they feel they do not belong. In some institutions, the adult students reportedly often feel they do not fit in with the younger student body. Although some evidence that this sentiment exists at Baker College was discovered in this study, most of the students I interviewed reported they felt they fit in and they felt very comfortable making contact with Baker College employees. This may be due, at least in part, to the possibility that these students felt they fit in because of their contacts inside the classroom; Tinto's research with traditional age students may not apply to adult learners. It is also possible that these older, adult students are operating from a different framework (Light, 1990), since most of them are living at home with a built-in support group, unlike the full-time, traditional-age, residential students Tinto studies. However, students whose emphasis is on attending strictly part time are even more at risk. Since part-time students often have lower educational expectations than full-time students, they are more likely to drop out, not understanding at the beginning of their quest the long-time costs, both financial and psychic, such as added stress on the family (McCormick, 1995). The typical Baker College student is attending part time while working and/or meeting family responsibilities, putting himself or herself at risk of dropping out of college.

Highlights from Findings

Any examination of the findings from this study must be tempered with the understanding of the differences of how the groups were defined. The PASSPORT participants were self-selected; i.e., after hearing a recruiting pitch for the program, they volunteered and eventually fulfilled that commitment by attending a PASSPORT session. The control group, on the other hand, was a randomly selected group of entering freshmen who were sent an initial questionnaire; some of these students volunteered to be

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interview subjects for this study while others were recruited. Any results from the PASSPORT group, therefore, must be looked at as possibly affected by students' preexisting motivation and other characteristics. Although the interview data indicate the PASSPORT students may be more highly motivated to succeed in college, they also seem to indicate a higher level of apprehension among PASSPORT participants, as evidenced by the nature and number of their responses. Data from the initial questionnaire designed to control for these factors were not included in this study due to the extremely low rate of return.

The fact that Baker College offers adult learners the option of "skipping" freshman orientation and registration when they enroll late by making Admissions representatives available indicates a possible misperception that adult learners need the process less than other students, a belief this study negates. The findings of this study indicate that adult learners need the reassurance offered by attending at least freshman orientation and registration. It is also possible that female adult learners are especially appreciative of a special program like PASSPORT to ease their fears about returning to or attending college for the first time later in life. The personal contact afforded by PASSPORT to program participants is consistent with Light's (1990) findings at Harvard: women prefer a personal relationship with an advisor or contact person and report more satisfaction with their college experience when that relationship is present.

Exception Report Incidences

The Exception Report findings, while initially disappointing, actually point out an interesting phenomenon that may be attributed to the PASSPORT program. That is, while the PASSPORT students were listed on the Exception Report as academically

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deficient at a higher rate than the nonPASSPORT students (n=23, 12, respectively), a much greater percentage of PASSPORT students brought their grades up to a passing average by the end of the quarter (n=20, 3, respectively). This happened without the intervention of official notification by the Academic Office. This finding seems to imply that the PASSPORT participants learned more academic and other skills that allowed them to recover from their academic difficulties. Perhaps the students knew to check their syllabi to learn their instructors' make-up policies for late work and/or missed tests. It is also possible that the students simply knew to apply themselves more in the second half of the quarter, having learned that college-level work gets progressively more difficult as the quarter progresses. Whatever the reason, the PASSPORT students raised their grades to a passing average at a significantly higher rate than the nonPASSPORT students.

Grade Point Averages

The difference in grade point averages of the two groups is a significant finding. Although the self-selection factor must be taken into account, the difference of half a percentage point between the groups' average grade point averages was statistically significant. Because the students in the two groups started college with almost identical average high school records (2.59 gpa for the PASSPORT group and 2.66 for the nonPASSPORT group), I do not believe that this entire difference can be attributed to the self-selection factor. A large part of this difference could certainly be due to the PASSPORT program itself. The fact that the PASSPORT students achieved this grade average while enrolled for an average of more credit hours is also a fact worthy of note. That is, not only did the PASSPORT students achieve a higher average gpa, but they also

achieved it for a higher number of credit hours. I feel it is safe to conclude that the students who completed the PASSPORT program were more confident in themselves, as evidenced by their higher number of credits, and they achieved a higher grade point average as a group, possibly as a result of having attended PASSPORT.

Completion and Return Rates

The PASSPORT students completed their first quarter and returned for a second and third quarter at a higher rate than the nonPASSPORT students. Although it is possible that these students were simply more highly motivated and that PASSPORT has had little effect on the retention rate, it would seem the intervention was instrumental in the students' success based on the other results from the study: the PASSPORT students were not only retained at a higher rate, but they also achieved a higher grade point average for their first quarter at Baker and attempted and completed more credit hours. In addition, I found many of the nonPASSPORT interview subjects whom I selected at random also to be highly motivated. Therefore, I find it more likely that the PASSPORT program did have at least some effect on the participants' return rate. Not only that, but also two PASSPORT participants identified the program as one of the sources of their confidence that they could finish their first quarter, and five others identified some element of PASSPORT as the source of their confidence. On the other hand, none of the nonPASSPORT participants identified any aspect of the freshman orientation and registration program as the source of their confidence.

As an afterthought to this study, I telephoned all of the nonPASSPORT interview subjects to find out why they had chosen not to attend PASSPORT. This was a question I had not thought to include in the interview protocol. Without exception, all of the

students who attended only a normal freshman orientation and registration remembered hearing about PASSPORT at their session and making the decision not to attend. All of these control-group subjects also stated they felt they did not need the extra help offered by the PASSPORT program. In addition, only one of the nonPASSPORT interview subjects reported attending an Excursion (follow-up session on topics such as self-esteem, time management, and stress management), while five PASSPORT interview subjects were among the reported twelve attendees. I must conclude at this point that the students' perception of his or her needs is not always accurate. Judging by the students' retention rate and group grade point average, it is logical to conclude that some of them might have benefited from the program.

Implications

Each time an additional ten-percent of a college's student population can be retained, a savings of \$1,033,500 results in the college's budget over the course of the students' academic careers (Noel and Levitz, 1997). Thus, this program may have saved the College a substantial amount of tuition revenue based on the potential number of students retained. There is, however, no way to know for certain the number of students or credit hours taken saved by PASSPORT because of the self-selection factor. To obtain meaningful results, the study would need to be replicated with changes made to control for other input factors. I would suggest including items to control for family background, including socioeconomic factors, such as level of parental education, family income, and school district. In addition, items should be included to allow insight into the level of family support, both financial as well as moral, for the student. The College already collects some of these data, but a clear data collection path should be established and

adhered to strictly. I would recommend also that the College establish a database through the AS/400 system to keep track of other data collected throughout the students' academic career, to include midterm Exception Report incidences, attendance records, and number of times the students log in to receive assistance from the Learning Support Center, Academic Office counselors, or other staff members. This would allow the College to formulate a truer picture of the "customer" than current demographics allow.

One interesting implication of this study has to do with the two students who gave negative reasons for returning to Baker College. The fact that these students shared a concern about their credits not transferring indicates that the College needs to improve its marketability and transferability image with its customer base. This is probably true of all colleges but especially of Baker College: students must be better informed of the value and portability of their credits and degrees. While it is possible that Admissions representatives themselves are perpetuating this misconception as a technique to promote the 2 + 2 program, I would recommend instead that, for better customer service, all "canned" tours include a mention of how easily the Baker associate and bachelor degrees transfer to major universities.

An important implication of the PASSPORT program is need to study its role in the life of the adult student. It is clear that participation in and enjoyment of this program by adult students contradicts a common misperception that adults do not need such intervention. Many of the students I interviewed in the course of this study indicated by the nature and quantity of their comments that PASSPORT was "just right" for them. The program was not an excessive amount of intervention, which might lead to a feeling of being patronized. The program also was not insufficient, as indicated by the low

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Excursion (follow-up session) attendance figures. The literature suggests a number of ways to market freshman seminars to adult learners; Baker College and others interested in retaining this student would do well to take a closer look at this research.

For Baker College's PASSPORT Program

Despite the fact that the fall PASSPORT sessions were over-enrolled, one facilitator suggested increasing enrollment by having the facilitators send a personal invitation/confirmation, to be followed by a personal telephone call. This approach would make it clear to the student that the facilitator is personally interested and genuinely wants him or her to attend. Probably this idea was indicated due to the preliminary findings concerning retention; despite the over-enrollment, this facilitator enthusiastically wanted to extend the benefits of PASSPORT to all entering students.

One suggestion for extending the reach of PASSPORT to all students is to incorporate it into the first week of some entry-level course, such as Composition I. I think a more logical place to incorporate the program would be in one or more of the remedial courses, since the majority (approximately 80 percent) of Baker College entering students begins with one or more remedial courses that must be taken before Composition I. Thus, Study Skills Workshop, English Review, and/or Reading Improvement would be a logical place to insert the PASSPORT program.

Another idea indicated by the interview data is to make PASSPORT the responsibility of the Admissions department. The rationale for the latter suggestion rests primarily in the fact that, for most new students, the admissions representative is the one person with whom they feel the most closely connected. This person could allow for a stronger sense of continuity in the transition from pre-college to the end of the first

quarter, when the students could then make the transition to academic advisors. This idea is supported by my findings from the interviews. Many of the students had very favorable comments to share about the Admissions staff, and most of the students who mentioned contacts with Admissions representatives referred to their contact person as “my Admissions counselor” or simply “my counselor.” While Tinto’s research (1993) stresses the importance of faculty contacts with students, he also discusses other contacts with members of the college community as important and potentially sufficient contacts to substitute for faculty contacts. Thus, a close advisory relationship with a member of the admissions staff could suffice to improve retention.

Another key idea echoes this and other research, especially Tinto’s (1993) work and the work done by Light at Harvard (1996?). That is to involve the students’ families. This kind of support is often crucial to adult students, people of color, and those making a drastic life change, especially for students with low self-esteem. The idea was suggested by a facilitator who shared a student’s testimony that she would not have had the courage to attend either freshman orientation and registration or PASSPORT without her family’s encouragement. It is very likely that the typical adult and commuter students who choose Baker are indeed operating from a framework very different from the one suggested by Tinto (1993), having significant outside relationships outside the college that keep them in attendance. They may feel integrated and connected simply through their contacts in the classroom, but a program that gets their families involved could significantly improve their ability to perform academically, thus increasing retention.

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Short of making PASSPORT mandatory for all entering students, other techniques should be included to improve attendance, as indicated by the findings of this study.

Incentives to attending PASSPORT could include having sign-ups at freshman orientation and registration; giving one hour of pass/fail credit; and improving publicity by putting information about the PASSPORT program on the World Wide Web or by putting testimonials about the program on video tapes to show in the Student Center while students are on break during freshman orientation and registration. One member of the "Baker Brain Trust" suggested a drawing for a \$100 gift certificate to the College Bookstore or for a scholarship that would pay for one credit hour of tuition. Another suggestion would be to offer a guarantee of sorts: PASSPORT participants who complete a degree program might be allowed to waive the \$50 graduation fee. I would conclude that the best way to encourage participation in PASSPORT is to make the motivation, learning, and rewards fun.

For Baker College's Faculty Advising Program

As many researchers (Gardenshire, 1996; Wilson, Gaff, Dienst, Wood, and Bavry, 1975; Wilson, Wood, and Gaff, 1974) have pointed out, it is important to include a professional development component in any freshman seminar program. Faculty and staff need to be trained (Levitz, 1997) in the importance of, ways of making, and kinds of contacts most helpful to retention so that they will understand and support the program. While there is a strong professional development program at Baker College and customer service is a cardinal rule, training sessions to renew staff members' commitment to retention by reviewing such concepts could be beneficial. There will be some changes

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made in the Fall 1998 professional development opportunities due to the inception of the faculty advising program. Many of the issues uncovered here will begin to be addressed when that change takes place.

For Other Institutions

This study examined PASSPORT, a freshman seminar program of a one-day duration. Although it appears to have been nominally successful, the results cannot be ascribed entirely to the intervention, largely due to the self-selection factor. However, I would like to see other freshman seminar programs of varying duration examined in order to find programs that do not require huge financial investments and that could still reap the reward of improved retention. A weekend-long program such as the one discussed in Chapter Two would be one alternative, with students staying in residence from Friday evening until Sunday evening. Another alternative is a program that might run for four or five half-days the week immediately before a quarter or semester begins. This would, in essence, bring students to the College a week earlier than classes begin and would help focus their thinking and perception at a most crucial time. Either alternative with one or more follow-up days during the first quarter would be another format that could be investigated. Follow-up sessions could be designed around students' preferences and used to encourage students to develop their skills as they are needed.

Another implication of the PASSPORT study, especially due to the minimal investment, is to encourage all faculty and staff members in a given institution to always consider their impact on students' persistence. Many of the exemplars given in Chapter Four illustrate this implication; many students attributed their comfort, their feelings of belongingness, and/or their confidence to some little thing some employee said or did.

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While none of the students stated they wanted to drop out of college because of anything an employee said or did, and both of the dropouts interviewed stated there was nothing the College could have done better to keep them in school, one implication of this study is to increase the amount of customer service training mandated for all employees, stressing the importance of going beyond the expectations of one's job. Because contacts outside the classroom are the most helpful for integrating students into the college community (Tinto, 1993) and because those contacts outside the classroom that are seen as warm, rewarding, and stimulating are most likely to indicate persistence, all staff members should be encouraged to "go the extra mile" in their customer service efforts to help build such contacts.

Voluntary freshman seminar programs, while they may be useful, do not address the needs of those students most unlikely to volunteer for such interventions. Making a freshman seminar mandatory, as employment seminar or some other capstone program often is, may be one alternative to improving attendance and motivation. Such an alternative could award one credit, which could count toward a student's general education distribution requirement. Awarding credit is often enough of an incentive to convince students of the seriousness of the material (Barefoot and Fidler, 1991). Alternatively, other motivators could include a guarantee that completion of PASSPORT and of an associate degree program would ensure the student could waive graduation fees might serve to make a mandatory program more palatable to the already busy adult student who resists attending the program.

Suggestions for Future Research

I would like to see this study replicated with some changes. Although it is unlikely any college would do so, I would recommend that the students be placed in PASSPORT or a similar program at random. Perhaps the assignment could be made by expanding some sections of freshman orientation and registration to include a PASSPORT program. This way, the students would not be told they were attending an alternative program and the statistics collected could then be more generalizable and reliable. I believe such a measure would be unlikely because most institutions would be unwilling to give some groups of students an advantage while leaving some students at a known (or suspected) disadvantage. Another recommendation would be to require the freshman seminar of all first-time freshmen. An institution following this recommendation could compare previous years' retention rates with the results of the mandatory program.

Perhaps a better recommendation would be to repeat the study while statistically controlling for differences in students' high school records, family background, and other input-output factors (Astin, 1993). Second, I would like to see demographics collected up front to allow for a more in-depth look at students' pre-college characteristics—high school gpa, family income, family values about education, and other factors that could be responsible for some of the results found in this study.

Another suggestion I have for future research on freshman seminar programs is to try other variations of the timing and the incentives. This intervention was only a one-day program before the students' first quarter began. Although follow-up sessions were scheduled and advertised widely, they were poorly attended. The "Excursions" following

PASSPORT in the fall quarter were advertised to the entire Baker College of Flint student population in a widely read newsletter, yet only 12 people attended a session. I would like to see the program expanded and the follow-up sessions made mandatory for certain students. PASSPORT could begin with a one-day, eight-hour program that could include normal freshman orientation and registration activities as well as an introductory freshman seminar program, to include presentations by key office staffs, a Scavenger Hunt to develop familiarity with the campus, and elements of time management, stress management, and self-esteem. Then, scheduled at timely intervals throughout the students' first quarter, could be sessions on note-taking, studying for exams, using resources, and goal setting. Another suggestion would be simply to drop the follow-up sessions, since they were not well attended, and add more sections of PASSPORT to make it more accessible to more students. Yet another recommendation for future research I would make is to design a study to learn why attendance at follow-up sessions was so poor, especially if follow-up sessions are to be included in the design of future programs. In addition, the College should make a serious effort to determine how the PASSPORT participants brought up their grades, especially in light of the fact that the College did not mail out Exception Reports during the Fall 1997 quarter. This research could impact the use of Exception Reports.

A third suggestion for improving PASSPORT is to study ways to incorporate more faculty-initiated contacts. Because many students feel hesitant to initiate contact with faculty, even when they need help, one way to improve retention is to encourage faculty members to make contact with students enrolled in freshman classes. That contact could be the deciding factor that keeps the students in college. Because so many

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of the interview subjects reported the feelings about how helpful their contacts were/were not, I would also recommend that all employees be trained in an ongoing program to be mindful of their contacts with students (O'Banion, 1997; Tinto, 1993). In addition, because other research (Neumann, 1985) also indicates the importance of teaching students to establish contacts, I would also recommend that Baker College include a component in PASSPORT that informs students of the importance and techniques of making contacts with faculty. The efficacy of such a move would be valuable research for all colleges and universities with a large adult population.

While the results of this study may not be generalizable to all institutions of higher learning or to all freshman seminar programs, the implications discussed above make a contribution to the literature in this field by exploring a variant of freshman seminar that had never been attempted before. The students involved in the initial PASSPORT program should be tracked over the next three to six years to learn the degree-completion rate of the Fall 1997 cohort. My prediction is the students in the PASSPORT group who entered Baker College of Flint with the intention of earning a degree will complete their degrees at a higher rate than the nonPASSPORT students with the same intention. While the faculty and staff at the College exhibit an intense on-going interest in retention, it is my hope that this research will re-invigorate retention efforts at that institution and will fuel the interest in retention at other institutions as well. The future financial solvency of the College depends on today's retention efforts. With the current demographics of the college student predicted to continue, much more research on the impact of retention efforts on adult learners is needed for colleges to maintain solvency.

APPENDICES

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FRESHMEN SEMINAR

Instructor Name:

Prerequisite(s): None

Corequisite(s): None

Description: Examines and assists students in developing skills important to college success. Areas include test-taking skills, note-taking skills, learning styles, time and stress management, study skills techniques and self-esteem. An introduction to college staff and faculty will also be incorporated.

TEXTBOOK: Making Your Mark 1st Edition. Fraser; LDF Publishing,
O-9696427-5-X.

MATERIALS PEPS Interpretation
Course Planning Grid
Project Planner
Weekly "To Do" List

FRESHMAN SEMINAR PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

The student will be introduced to the following:

STUDY SKILLS AND NOTETAKING SESSION

STUDY SKILLS - Section 3 of text - Taken from "Seventeen Ways to Study Smarter"

1. **Schedule Regular Study Periods**
 - Set aside a specific time to review
 - Rehearse regularly and repetitively
 - Start on time
2. **Establish a regular study area**
 - You become conditioned to study in this area
 - Your mind will kick into gear, even when you don't feel like studying
 - This gives a permanent place to keep pens, notes, etc., so you don't waste study time looking for them
3. **Study when you are awake**
 - Determine the best time of day for you to study based upon learning styles and schedule
 - Use pockets of time in between classes
 - It's better to sleep when your body is telling you to, and wake up a little bit earlier the next morning for a final review
4. **Start assignments as soon as they are given**
 - A little work on an assignment each week will allow you time to give attention to its quality. Your workload will be spread out, so you'll avoid a log jam near the end of the semester. If your assignment is due near exam time, you'll avoid using study time completing a project.
5. **Study your most difficult subjects first**
 - This is when you are most alert
 - You'll get "the worst" out of the way

NOTETAKING TIPS - From Section 2 of Text "Taking Notes in Class" and "Notetaking Tips"

1. **Review the 4Rs method of notetaking**
2. **Read/Skim your text before class**
 - You'll know which are main areas of study
 - You'll be more familiar with the terminology/vocabulary
 - The lecture will be reinforced
3. **Sit close to the teacher**
 - This makes it easier to focus your attention on the lecture
 - It's easier to hear your professor
4. **Use abbreviations**
 - Develop a set of abbreviations and symbols that will save you time in class

5. Use lots of paper
 - Don't cram your notes
 - Use lots of space
 - Write on one side of the page only
6. Leave spaces if you can't keep up
 - Immediately after class, fill in missing information
 - Borrow a friend's notes to fill in what's missing
7. Compare notes
 - Sit down with two or three classmates and exchange notes; you'll get a different perspective of what the most important course information is. Discussing why your peers took down certain points may help you see what should be included in your notes and what is important.

TEST TAKING AND LISTENING SKILLS SESSION

TEST TAKING

From Section 5 of text - "How To Study for Exams"

1. Getting Started - Practice Tests
2. A Grab Bag of Exam Study Tips
 - Be prepared
 - Do your homework
 - Review regularly
 - Study your weakest subjects first
 - Ask for help
 - Understand vs. memorize
 - Look at old exams
 - Attend end of semester classes
 - Review in a group
 - Don't study too long
 - Eat well and get a good night's sleep
3. Hints for Objective Exams
4. Hints for Open Book Exams
5. Hints for Essay Exams
6. The ABCs of Eliminating Exam Anxiety

LISTENING SKILLS

Taken from Section 2 - Notetaking - Listen to This (pp. 5 - 6)

1. L - Lead
2. I - Ideas
3. S - Summarize
4. T - Talk
5. E - End
6. N - Notes

LEARNING STYLES AND SELF-ESTEEM

LEARNING STYLES SECTION

1. Review PEPS results and have students complete PEPS Interpretation handout

SELF-ESTEEM SECTION

- 1 Self Esteem means appreciating my own worth and importance, and having the character to be accountable for myself and to act responsibly toward others.
 - At some point, I must take action
 - Before taking action you must have a plan
 - Goals must be achievable, and written with a realistic time frame
2. The correct attitude leads to action, which leads to achievements which, when acknowledged, lead to higher self-esteem.
3. The two major sources of thoughts we have about ourselves are... what we hear and experience, and what we say to ourselves.
 - Take charge of your thoughts; you have that control
 - Think positively
 - What you say to yourself--your personal language--is what you believe, and what you believe is who you are.
4. The past is past. Embark on your journey to success now, at this very moment.
5. Vision success, your dreams must be conscious, positive and for yourself Limitations on "our vision or dreams may slip into your envisioning. Consciously push those limitations out of your mind, and affirm as though your dreams are already realities.
6. Sample Exercise -- Have one student volunteer to stand in front of the classroom. Ask that student to raise his/her dominant arm straight out in front of him/herself Explain to the

student that you will attempt to push the arm down and that he/she should resist. After demonstrating the student's strength have the student put his/her arm down.

Discuss with students how we often defeat ourselves with negative attitudes about what we can and cannot do. Have them give examples. As a demonstration of a negative attitude have the student volunteer close his/her eyes and repeat 10 times, out loud, "I am weak and worthless." Once again have the student raise his/her arm in front of his/herself. Again push the student's arm down (This should be accomplished with little to no resistance).

Now, discuss with students what effects a positive attitude can have on the way tasks are accomplished. Again, let students give examples. Have the volunteer close his/her eyes and repeat 10 times out loud, "I am strong and worthwhile." Once again have the student raise his/her arm in front of his/herself. Again, push the student's arm down (This should be accomplished with some resistance). Reinforce that positive attitudes lead to stronger results.

TIME/STRESS MANAGEMENT SESSION

TIME MANAGEMENT

1. From Section One-- Timing Is Everything
Calendar -- Semester (Found at back of text)
Weekly (Found at back of text) Daily Schedule
2. Course Planning Grid
3. Project Planner
4. Time Wise

STRESS MANAGEMENT - From Section 6 of Text, 'Managing College Life'

1. Seven Ways to Cope With It All (pp.32 - 33)
 - a. Talk to Someone
 - b. Make Your Escape
 - c. Let it Out
 - d. Forget About It
 - e. Do Something Nice
 - f. Do One Thing At a Time
 - g. Give Yourself A Break
2. Money worries
3. Schoolwork worries
4. College Services
5. College Friends

Interview Protocol--PASSPORT Participants

1. What led to the decision to attend Baker?
 - Did you feel any apprehension?
2. Why Baker?
3. What happened at the freshman orientation and registration you attended?
 - How did it help in your adjustment to college?
4. Why did you decide to sign up for a PASSPORT session?
5. Did you attend a PASSPORT session?
 - What was it like?
 - Did it meet your expectations?
6. How did attending the PASSPORT session help with any apprehensions?
7. How did the information from the PASSPORT session affect your beliefs and/or behaviors during your first quarter at Baker College?
8. What have you told/would you tell others about PASSPORT if they were thinking about going to Baker?
9. How could we improve PASSPORT?
10. Have you ever heard a faculty member or someone else refer to “the Baker family?”
 - If yes, can you describe for me your position in the Baker family?
 - Do you feel like you belong to the Baker family?
 - What is your role, and how do you interact with others here?
11. How many times did you interact in any way with anyone who works here at Baker last quarter?
 - Were they faculty, administrative staff, other employees?
 - Describe some of those encounters to me.
 - Which one(s) stand out in your mind the most?
 - Why?
 - If you did not interact in any way with anyone who works here, why?
 - How comfortable do you feel contacting employees?
12. Which extracurricular activities have you been involved in at Baker College?
13. Why did you return to Baker College of Flint for a second quarter?
14. Was there some point in the first quarter when you thought you wouldn’t make it?
 - When?
 - What did you do?
 - If you never felt that you wouldn’t make it, what made you so confident?

Interview Protocol--nonPASSPORT Participants

15. What led to the decision to attend Baker?
 - Did you feel any apprehension?
16. Why Baker?
17. What happened at the freshman orientation and registration you attended?
 - How did it help in your adjustment to college?
 - Did it meet your expectations?
18. How did the information from freshman orientation affect your beliefs and/or behaviors during your first quarter at Baker College?
19. What have you told/would you tell others about freshman orientation if they were thinking about going to Baker?
20. How could we improve freshman orientation?
21. Have you ever heard a faculty member or someone else refer to "the Baker family?"
 - If yes, can you describe for me your position in the Baker family?
 - Do you feel like you belong to the Baker family?
 - What is your role, and how do you interact with others here?
22. How many times did you interact in any way with anyone who works here at Baker last quarter?
 - Were they faculty, administrative staff, other employees?
 - Describe some of those encounters to me.
 - Which one(s) stand out in your mind the most?
 - Why?
 - If you did not interact in any way with anyone who works here, why?
 - How comfortable do you feel contacting employees?
23. Which extracurricular activities have you been involved in at Baker College?
24. Why did you return to Baker College of Flint for a second quarter?
25. Was there some point in the first quarter when you thought you wouldn't make it?
 - When?
 - What did you do?
 - If you never felt that you wouldn't make it, what made you so confident?

Thesaurus

- I. Retention / Reasons for returning to Baker College
 - A. Next logical step
 - B. Fear of credits not transferring
 - C. Enjoyment of program, classes, or college
 - D. Belongingness
 - E. Long-term investment
- II. Satisfaction / Reasons for choosing Baker College
 - A. Convenience
 - B. Academic scholarships
 - C. Congruence of students' goals with College's mission
 - D. Friendship / Belongingness
- III. Levels of apprehension
- IV. Reasons for choosing to attend PASSPORT
 - A. Overcoming apprehension
 - B. Desire for connectedness
- V. Perceptions of Benefits of PASSPORT and freshman orientation programs
 - A. Familiarity with campus
 - B. Connectedness
 - C. Perception of freshman orientation and orientation
- VI. Improving / recommending PASSPORT and freshman orientation programs
 - A. Likelihood of recommending PASSPORT to a prospective student
 - B. Improvement of programs
- VII. Level of Student Integration / Contact
 - A. Contacts with college services
 - B. Degree of comfort with contacts
 - C. Involvement in extracurricular activities
- VIII. Reasons for confidence
 - A. Personality
 - B. Learning support center
 - C. Other factors
 - D. Dropouts

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